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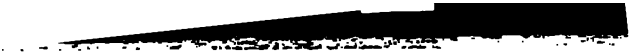
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*New Edn*

POLICY AND PASSION.

Ken Edm

POLICY AND PASSION.



# POLICY AND PASSION.

*A Novel of Australian Life.*

BY


MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED.

*A NEW EDITION.*



LONDON :  
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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

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IN placing before the English public a novel dealing exclusively with Australian life, a few prefatory remarks may not be inapplicable.

That the mother country should be comparatively unacquainted with the features and characteristics, the inner-workings, the social interests, and great and petty political aspirations of this most promising of her offspring, is a fact principally to be attributed to the onesidedness of the intellectual intercourse which at present connects Great Britain with the Antipodes.

By means of books, more especially contemporary fiction, the Australian of the second generation may render himself familiar with most phases of British society. On the other hand, the Englishman desirous of penetrating to the hidden sources of thought and action which govern the lives of his colonial brethren, though he has to acknowledge deep obligations to several influential English writers and to a smaller number of Antipodean authors, must deplore the limited medium of communion offered to his imagination by the literature emanating directly from Australia.

It can be no matter for conjecture that when in the course of years Australia shall have appropriated to herself an independent position among those occupied by more ancient nations, and shall have formulated a social and political system adapted to the conditions of her development and



growth, she will possess a literature of her own as powerful and original as might be prognosticated, from the influences of nature and civilisation brought to bear upon the formation of a distinct national type.

But the time for this is hardly yet ripe.

Yet, the fluttering heart-beats and spasmodic efforts ; the struggles after a dimly recognised good, and the many failures of achievement ; the conflict of personal and patriotic ambition ; the imperfect assimilation of traditional ideas with unconventional circumstances ; the contrast between human passion unsoftened by the veil of refinement with which civilisation drapes that which is foul, and of rudely-expressed yearnings after the nobler motives of existence—all these contending elements which go far towards making up the sum of young life in the individual or the race, appeal with pathos and peculiar interest to the parent nature which has given them birth.

It has been my wish to depict in these pages certain phases of Australian life, in which the main interests and dominant passions of the personages concerned are identical with those which might readily present themselves upon an European stage, but which, directly and indirectly, are influenced by striking natural surroundings, and by the conditions of being inseparable from the youth of a vigorous and impulsive nation.

The scenery described here is drawn directly from nature ; and the name of Leichardt's Land—a tribute to the memory of a daring but ill-fated explorer—is but a transparent mask covering features that will be familiar to many of my Australian readers.

But it is to the British public that I, an Australian, address myself, with the hope that I may in some slight degree aid in bridging over the gulf which divides the Old World from the Young.

R. M. PRAED.

## CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. AT BRAYSHER'S INN . . . . .	1
II. THE PREMIER . . . . .	8
III. THE PREMIER'S STOREKEEPER . . . . .	16
IV. THE WEAVING OF THE SPELL . . . . .	29
V. MRS. VALLANCY'S HOME . . . . .	42
VI. 'YOU MUST MARRY HONORIA LONGLEAT'	51
VII. AN AUSTRALIAN EXPLORER . . . . .	63
VIII. THE ENCHANTRESS OF KOORALBYN . . . . .	80
IX. THE FERRIS MENAGE . . . . .	89
X. HERCULES AND OMPHALE . . . . .	96
XI. ANGELA . . . . .	108
XII. ON THE LAGOON . . . . .	120
XIII. FATHER AND DAUGHTER . . . . .	127
XIV. THE COUP D'ÉTAT . . . . .	142
XV. THE DRYAD OF THE TI-TREE . . . . .	150
XVI. BARRINGTON AND HONORIA . . . . .	157
XVII. 'YOU'LL GET THE CROOKED STICK AT LAST'	171
XVIII. MUSIC IN THE VERANDA . . . . .	181
XIX. A PICNIC IN THE MOUNTAINS . . . . .	188
XX. IN THE SCRUB . . . . .	196
XXI. THE LIPS THAT WERE NEAREST . . . . .	205
XXII. THE WORSHIP OF SHAKESPEARE . . . . .	213
XXIII. MISS LONGLEAT AT THE BUNYAS . . . . .	219
XXIV. FASCINATION . . . . .	231
XXV. 'YOU SHALL BE MY FAITH' . . . . .	241
XXVI. BARRINGTON A REJECTED SUITOR . . . . .	249
XXVII. THE TRYST BY THE BAMBOOS . . . . .	262

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXVIII. TOM DUNGIE GOSSIPS . . . . .	272
XXIX. THE DIAMONDS . . . . .	286
XXX. 'AT THE CENTRE OF PEACE' . . . . .	296
XXXI. MR. VALLANCY'S RETURN . . . . .	308
XXXII. 'IF I HAVE BEEN BAD TO YOU, IT IS ENDED NOW' . . . . .	315
XXXIII. AN INTERVIEW WITH SAMMY DEANS . . . . .	324
XXXIV. NEWS BY THE MAIL . . . . .	331
XXXV. IN PERIL . . . . .	340
XXXVI. SAVED . . . . .	350
XXXVII. SINISTER OMENS . . . . .	360
XXXVIII. THE DINNER TO GENERAL COMPTON . . . . .	367
XXXIX. BEFORE THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT . . . . .	377
XL. THE ORDEAL . . . . .	385
XLI. THE IMPEACHMENT OF THE PREMIER . . . . .	399
XLII. LAST WORDS . . . . .	415
XLIII. THE KNOTTING OF THE THREADS . . . . .	428

# POLICY AND PASSION.



## CHAPTER I.

### AT BRAYSHER'S INN.

BRAYSHER'S, the chief inn at Kooya, was a one-storied, wooden building, placed at the junction of the two principal streets of the township. A wide verandah, enclosed by dingy railings which had been originally painted green, and filled with squatters' chairs and small wooden tables, extended round the two visible sides of the hotel. A bar, much frequented by the roughs who came down from the bush 'for a spree,' faced one of the streets, and a coffee-room, which served as a rendezvous for the passengers by Cobb's coach to and from Leichardt's Town, and opened by glass doors on to the verandah, fronted the other thoroughfare.

It wanted now about an hour to the time at which the coach usually started, and the vehicle, ready to be horsed, was drawn up beside the sign-post. It was a clumsy affair, painted red and yellow. A wooden framework supported an awning, of which the leather curtains might be pulled up or down at will; in front there was a high driver's box; two wooden benches faced each other behind, and at the extreme end was a third, only to be approached by a scramble

over the backs of the others. The coach was generally drawn by five horses.

The time was half-past four in the afternoon of a sultry day in February. A storm brooded in the distance, and there was an ominous stillness in the atmosphere. The oleanders and loquat-trees before the opposite houses looked brown and thirsty. The acacias in the inn garden drooped with sickly languor; and the spiky crowns of the golden pine-apples beneath them were thickly coated with dust. Flaming hibiscus flowers stared at the beholder in a hot, aggressive fashion. There was no green shadow anywhere to afford relief to eyes wearied with brightness and colour. Brassy clouds were gathering slowly in the west, and the sun, beating pitilessly upon the zinc roofs of the verandahs, was mercilessly refracted from the glaring limestone hills that formed the eastern border of the township.

Two long roads intersected each other at the inn corner. One stretched away into the bush, where it wound among gaunt gum-trees, and lost itself in the dull herbage with which the country was overgrown; the other seemed to terminate abruptly upon the summit of a chalky ridge, where a clump of grass trees, with their brown, spear-like tufts erect, looked like sentinels to the barren scene.

Wooden-porticoed shanties, alternating at intervals with brick public offices; newly-painted stores, which displayed all varieties of wares; and gaudy public-houses, round which clustered brawny, sunburnt navvies, lined, but did not shade, the streets. The general air of the place was one of inaction. Sometimes a bullock-dray, piled with bales of wool or station stores, would rumble by; or a covered cart, driven by a weather-beaten German woman from some neighbouring selection, would pause for a moment in front of Braysher's, while its owner interchanged a few words with some acquaintance lounging at the bar.

More frequently a bushman, in Crimean shirt and mole-skins, with his coat strapped before him, would clatter over the stony road and dismount before the inn. First, he would unsaddle his horse, hanging its bridle on to the railings of the verandah, while the animal, accustomed to the habits of the place, would find its own way to the water-trough. Next, the new-comer would don his coat, and sidle across to the post-office opposite, whence he would shortly return, laden with letters and newspapers, which he would place upon the arm of a squatter's chair in readiness for inspection. Then, after carefully choosing the shadiest side of the verandah, he would stretch his legs at full length, dangle his feet over the railings, call for a glass of grog to wash the dust out of his throat, thereby intensifying the redness of a sun-baked face, and would finally set himself to the perusal of his correspondence.

Many bushmen had arrived at Braysher's that afternoon, and all had gone through exactly the same formula, with the occasional addition of a greeting to one or other of those already assembled on the inn verandah.

'Good-day to you ;' 'Steaming hot ;' 'Looks like a storm brewing ;' 'Very dry up country ;' 'Fine weather this for the cotton-growers ;' and such-like interjectional remarks sounded unfamiliarly in the ears of an English gentleman but lately arrived in Australia, who was leaning against one of the verandah-posts, contemplating with languid interest the scene around him.

He was smoking, and apart from his air and physique, the silver-mounted match-box in his hand and the perfume of his expensive cigar sufficiently indicated him to the intelligence of the bushmen as 'a chap from the old country.' Nevertheless, his tall, broadly-built figure, bronzed, high-bred face, and soldier-like bearing, had no generic affinity with the lank limbs, the fresh-coloured, supine features, and

frank gullibility of the typical *new chum*. The boldest *old hand* would hardly have attempted to play a practical joke upon Hardress Barrington.

He looked about thirty-five. The upper part of his face was fine, with a touch of nobility in the high forehead, broad at its base, but slightly receding at the crown. The dark-brown hair fringed off in little rings from the temples. The brows were strongly marked and wrinkled together in a frown, which deepened the indentures of the sockets, and gave to the grey eyes a remarkable intensity of expression. The nose was straight, with a somewhat coarse conformation of nostril, and had on each side a deep line extending below the upper lip. The mouth was concealed by a heavy moustache, and the clean-shaven, slightly prominent chin was cleft in the centre. A handsome man, upon whom it would be impossible for the stranger not to bestow several glances of interest, and of whom it might be safely surmised that he had travelled much and had come into contact with various grades of society.

‘I suppose that Cobb’s coach is on its last legs now,’ said one of the squatters, relighting a short black pipe that had expired between his lips. ‘I shouldn’t wonder if we had steam-carriages to Leichardt’s Town before December year. Do you think that Longleat will carry his railway bill this session?’

‘There’ll be a stiff fight over the Speech,’ said a red-faced bushman, in a cabbage-tree hat, laying down the *Leichardt’s Town Chronicle*, which he had been diligently perusing. ‘Middleton has been blowing no end, up north; and there are some snug berths to be given away. Folks must have an eye to their own pockets; and for all the blather that people talk about impartiality, there’s no doubt that bribery tells in the long-run.’

‘I’ll back Longleat,’ said another. ‘He is the devil for

sticking to his purpose. He said he'd make the colony, and he is going the right way to work. What Leichardt's Land wants is money, and money means Immigration and Public Works. Hullo, Tom Dungie! Down from the Koorong, eh? Why, you've given the little piebald a sore back with your hard riding.'

Tom Dungie, the mail-man, who had halted at the post-office across the street, had just removed his saddle with its load of brown leather post-bags, and was ruefully regarding a puffy spot above the loin, which threatened unpleasant consequences to a dearly-loved pony. Two other horses which he had been driving, one of which bore a pair of empty saddle-bags, were browsing by the wayside. Dungie was a tiny fat man, with small, twinkling grey eyes, a round face, and a whining voice.

'It's from all the lies I'm a-carryin',' he squeaked. 'The little piebald, she's a righteous 'oss; and Lord! them Parliamentary rigmaroles—there's seven of 'em in blue envelopes from Kooralbyn—do hact like a James's blister upon a sensitive back.'

A shout of laughter greeted Tom Dungie's explanation; but he maintained an imperturbable gravity during the explosion.

'Who's the hack for?' inquired one of the dwellers at Braysher's.

'It's that there lord at Dyraba as has a new chum agoin' in for colonial experience,' squeaked Dungie, giving each of the supernumerary beasts a sharp smack on the wither. 'I say, Mr. Braysher, put the 'acks up, and don't let 'em be turned out for any of your swell customers. My word! it's awful dry to-day—Longleat's on the road behind.'

'Longleat!' shouted a group of men at the bar; and soon the cry spread through the township. Even the children playing at fives with the pebbles in the road caught



it up, and their mothers rushed out to join in the excitement. Before many minutes a small crowd had assembled in front of Braysher's.

'Who is Longleat?' asked the Englishman.

'Longleat!' echoed a hirsute squatter, who expectorated freely, and frankly owned to American origin. 'Longleat!' he repeated, not looking at his questioner, but gazing over the heads of the crowd into the vista of houses and distant trees. 'Wal! it's my opeenion, sir, that it 'ud be worth your while to study up the politics of this 'ere rising colony, ef it's only to become acquainted with the career of Thomas Longleat, of Kooralbyn—a remarkable man, sir. The Champion of the working class; the Pillar of Progress; and the Enemy of a tyrannical and parsimonious democracy.'

The speaker drawled out with lagging eloquence his emphasised adjectives, hitched up his trousers, and slouched to the other end of the verandah, his eyes still fixed upon the distant object of his attention, which was rapidly resolving itself into a flying speck advancing mid a cloud of freshly-raised dust.

'But who *is* Longleat?' inquired Barrington again.

'Member for Kooya, and Premier of Leichardt's Land,' replied a spry little stockman in moleskins.

'Thank you,' said Barrington.

'A remarkable specimen, sir, of the vicissitudes of Australia,' said the first speaker, returning to his former position against the verandah-rails. 'It's a known fact that Thomas Longleat began life in this colony as a bullock-driver. He ain't ashamed to own up to it. A bullock-driver on these very roads that he is spanking over now with the finest team in Leichardt's Land. A man as yoked his own beasts, and spread his tarpaulin, and chewed his quid of tobacco when the day's work was over; and now, why if he floats his Railway Loan, her Majesty will make

him a Knight of St. Michael and St. George, as sure as we're standing in Braysher's verandah. Here he comes.'

A buggy, drawn by four steaming chestnuts, rattled down the road, and was pulled up in front of the hotel. A stout red-faced gentleman with a swelling chest and commanding presence, clad in white linen clothes, and wearing a broad-brimmed puggareed hat, descended from the vehicle. He was followed by a wizened-up little man, with very thin legs and a hooked nose, whose ferret-like face was fringed by a border of iron-grey hair, and wore an unpleasant, saturnine expression.

The mob set up a cheer, which Longleat acknowledged by a good-humoured salutation, while his voice, sonorous but unrefined, sounded clearly above the uproar, as he addressed the innkeeper.

'Hi, Braysher! Good-day to you. I am going to Leichardt's 'Town by the coach to-night; but Mr. Ferris will be stopping here for a day or so. Look after my horses, will you? Have you got four stalls empty?'

The innkeeper advanced and touched his hat, a mark of deference he had not shown to any of the previous arrivals.

'Well, sir, we're pretty full, but we'll manage. There's Dungle brought down two hacks for that there lord up your way; but they can go off to the paddock, and we'll make room somehow for your team.'

Mr. Longleat smiled, tickled and somewhat flattered by the evident fact, that 'that there lord' was in Braysher's estimation of very small importance compared with himself.

He shook hands with some of the men in the verandah, called for a tumbler of cold water which he drank standing, and said in a patronising tone to his companion, who had ordered a glass of brandy in the coffee-room:

'A bad thing, Ferris. Stick to Adam's ale in a hot climate. Temperance and success, that's been my motto,

and I've got no cause to complain of the way I've got on in life.'

Mr. Ferris retreated scowling to partake of his refreshment; and the Premier, after throwing a 'chaffing' word to Dungie, who was inclined to resent the summary expulsion of his horses, turned his eyes upon Barrington. He stared at the Englishman with a half-angry curiosity, as though he recognised in him the representative of an order for which he had no liking.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PREMIER.

THE mob round the hotel had thickened fast, and as the Premier stood in Braysher's verandah surveying the crowded street, the rowdies set up a series of shouts.

'Hooray for Thomas Longleat! Go it, old chap, for the Railway; pitch into the obstructionist crew! Down with Middleton and his sneaking northerners!' concluding with an unanimous cry, 'I say, Longleat, give us a bit of talk. Open your jaw while you're waiting, and let 'em have it hot.'

The Premier shook his head, half deprecating, half acknowledging his popularity with the Kooya mob, now considerably augmented by a band of idle navvies in blue shirts and felt caps, to whom the cry of 'the Railway' was the herald of a new era of pay and plenty.

'We don't mean to let you clear out in this 'ere — coach till you've told us what's agoin to become of *us* when Parliament meets,' cried one of these insistent, perching himself upon a wheel of Cobb's.

'We aren't the sort of chaps to be put off any longer with these 'ere screws,' shrieked another rough, who had clambered

to the box-seat. 'It's steam 'osses that suits our money. Hooray for Longleat's railway! Come, go it, old chap! Tell us that you hain't got no intention of caving in to them stingy oppositionists.'

The Premier came forward to the edge of the verandah, and took off his hat. As he stood in the glare of the declining sun, his head thrown back, his big chest expanded, with his broad capable forehead, his keen eyes looking out steadily from under shaggy brows, his under lip slightly protruding and giving to his coarsely-moulded face an expression of suave self-complacency, in spite of the drawbacks of evident low birth and vulgar assertiveness, there were in his bearing and features indications of intellectual power and iron resolution, which would have impressed a higher-class mob than that now waiting eagerly for his words. His brawny hands, rough still with the traces of work and exposure, grasped the verandah-rails, while he began to speak in an easy conversational style, unembellished by any flowers of oratory.

'Electors and friends,' said Mr. Longleat, 'you've asked me to make you a speech before I travel down to Leichardt's Town, in Cobb's coach yonder; and I dare say you would all cheer me as loudly as your lungs would let you, if I just took that vehicle for my text in a tirade against the petty jealousy of northern politicians, who grudge to the populated south a means of locomotion of which there ain't enough of squatters, let alone free selectors, to make any use up there. But it's not my way to abuse the bridge that has carried me over, and I won't cry down Cobb's coach, that, scores of times when I have been driving hard all day from Kooralbyn, has saved my horses' legs and my own temper. You can't have railways at a moment's notice, my men; and it's not so very long ago that we all thought it a fine and wonderful thing to have any sort of a public conveyance between

Leichardt's Town and Kooya. It's a nice, roomy, well-built vehicle, and has done its work well ; and I mean no disrespect to Mr. Cobb when I say to you here that I hope, before two years are out, to travel from this town to the metropolis in one that'll be easier about the springs, and more commodious for the carriage of our wool and cotton to port, and our meat and vegetables to market.

'I have driven fifty miles to-day, along a roughish bit of country, and am not much inclined for public speaking ; but since you want to know what my policy is going to be this coming session, I'll tell you. I'm going to fight might and main for your railway ; and if the public feeling is what I take it to be, there's not much doubt but that you'll have it. Not because you want it. I do the best I can for my constituency, but I bear in mind that Kooya is not the only electorate in Leichardt's Land. It's because our colony requires the fresh impetus which she will receive from the circulation of new moneys, that I'm going to move heaven and earth to float the Loan which I shall bring before Parliament at the opening of the session.

'There are folks up north, and down south too, that say the Ministry will knock under, and that when Parliament meets the Railway question will be shuffled over, and the Opposition conciliated, because Thomas Longleat likes power and place, and means to stick to his seat in the Treasury. Now, I say that's a lie ! Thomas Longleat never knocked under in his life, and he's not going to be trodden on now. If he is thrashed, and the country goes agen him, he'll take his licking and bide his time ; but if he knows that the country is with him, he'll fight for her while he has got a voice to speak with and a leg to stand on. The Railway Loan will be the party question of this session, and upon it my Government stands or falls. You all know me here ; it's my way to carry through what I've set my mind on. It's

my determination—some call it luck and some call it obstinacy—that's got me on in life. I ain't ashamed to tell you that I began in Leichardt's Land bullock-driving along this very road I'm going over to-night. I was a rough sort of chap in those days, my friends, but I'd got the *will* in me strong even then. I said to myself, "I'll rise," and I have risen. I've climbed inch by inch, step by step, till I'm nigh the topmost bough of the tree ; and I'm proud of what I've done. It's Leichardt's Land that has made me ; and when I see my benefactress low and sinking, it's not surprising that I want mine to be the hand to lift her up again. We are watching a critical point in her history. Nations have their turning-points, their times of weakness and depression, the same as human beings. Leichardt's Land is like a sick person whose powers have been enfeebled, and whose glorious capabilities have been contracted by years of parsimonious neglect. She needs a fillip. You have heard of a wonderful operation called transfusion, by which fresh vitalising blood is sent coursing through languid veins, and a new impetus is given to the springs of life. It is the transfusion of money, the blood of nations, that Leichardt's Land requires to make her flush and strong.

'Let a temporary loan, which will, ere long, repay itself fourfold, be poured into her treasury, and we shall see, in a short space of time, railways penetrating to the very heart of her rich pastures ; bridges spanning her rivers ; her mines yielding gold and jewels, her plantations sugar and cotton ; the European market supplied with her wool, and the colonial market with her produce. My friends, the Loan Bill, which will come before the House immediately, is not a mere question of internecine jealousy and party rancour, but of the introduction of new life and vigour into a glorious but debilitated colony !'

Longleat, as he concluded his peroration, his rough elo-

quence kindling as he opened upon his subject, stood for a moment, his shoulders thrown back, his face bland, his under lip projecting, ere he proceeded with his address.

But at this moment the coach-horses, ready harnessed, were brought round from the inn-yard, and there arose some little confusion amidst the crowd in the street ; while the sound of a woman's cry arrested any further words with which Mr. Longleat might have intended to occupy the five minutes which must elapse before the starting of the coach.

A lady dressed in black, slight and delicate-looking, had been pushed somewhat violently against one of the posts of Braysher's verandah. She was evidently a passenger by Cobb's to Leichardt's Town, and being alone, and naturally alarmed at finding herself in the centre of a political demonstration, was making for the shelter of the hotel.

The Premier, attracted by the cry, glanced downwards from his raised position, and met the appealing gaze of a pair of dark eyes which he knew well. With more agility than might have been expected, judging by his age and figure, he vaulted the railings, and in a moment was at the lady's side.

'Mrs. Vallancy !' he exclaimed. 'How is it that you are here ?'

She grasped his arm, and her eyes beamed with gratitude upon his face.

'I have been staying with the Ansons, at Cooranga. Mr. Anson brought me down, but could not wait to see me off in the coach. I am going to Leichardt's Town this evening.'

'So am I. I shall be able to look after you. You've been knocked agen the railings. I hope you are not hurt ?'

'No ; it was a mere nothing. I am not hurt—only a little frightened, but quite happy now that you are here. I am glad that I have heard you speak in this way. It impresses

one in a different manner to the dull debates which one listens to from the Ladies' Gallery. And, you know,' she added in a lower tone, 'I make rather a merit of not taking any great interest in politics; it would not do for me to side openly against my husband, whatever I might think and wish in private.'

Mr. Longleat pressed his companion's hand, appreciating her delicacy at its very highest pitch. A man of coarse fibre is apt to attribute ultra-refinement to a woman by whom he is attracted.

Mr. Vallancy was a member of the Legislative Council. Though notoriously needy, and desirous of a Government appointment, he belonged to the Middleton faction, and had made himself peculiarly obnoxious to the reigning Ministry. The Premier had become acquainted with Mrs. Vallancy a short time before the present date; and notwithstanding the inimical attitude of her husband, certain casual meetings and suggestive conversations had deepened a budding interest into something more than commonplace social intimacy.

'I am sorry that you should have been annoyed by the crowd. I—they insisted upon my speaking—upon my word I could not have got out of it. I wish I had known that you were to be here.'

He spoke with a nervous utterance that, except in the presence of ladies, was unusual to him.

'Ah!' said Mrs. Vallancy in a tone half-melancholy, half-arch, 'I know that you are the idol of the mob; such popularity must be very delightful. I sincerely hope that you will carry your Railway Bill. I had never before connected it so personally with you. Party questions have been sources of annoyance to me. This one will possess a more agreeable interest.'

They had stepped on to the verandah, and Mr. Longleat placed one of the canvas chairs for his companion to sit



upon. All the men turned to look at her, but not one, except Barrington, took his pipe from his lips. Though she was perfectly aware of the attention she excited, she did not appear to be embarrassed by it. Her hat had been tilted back by the push she had sustained, and her low brow and fine eyes were fully visible. The latter were black, slightly prominent, and restless and dissatisfied in expression; her mouth, a curved red line, was more characteristic than sweet; her colouring was clear and pale: her voice low and remarkably distinct.

The nervous excitability and sensitive refinement which her face and manner suggested, were quite calculated to impress such a temperament as that of Mr. Longleat; but although his admiration was obvious, it was evident that he had not acquired perfect ease in her society. In spite of the feminine experience implied by two matrimonial bereavements, and the bringing up of a daughter, companionship with women of a particular calibre gave him an uncomfortable sense of inferiority, and made him conscious of certain lapses in grammar, and faults in pronunciation, which considerable proficiency as a public speaker and years of unwearied self-education had not enabled him entirely to surmount.

‘Is Miss Longleat with you?’ inquired Mrs. Vallancy.

‘No,’ he replied. ‘She is at Kooralbyn.’

‘I am longing to see her again. Some friends of mine who met her in Sydney last winter wrote to me in raptures about her beauty. Is she as lovely as ever?’

Mr. Longleat smiled, and elevated his head with an air of gratified pride.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I think she is handsomer now than I’ve ever seen her. She took her place in Sydney amongst the best of ’em.’

As he spoke he caught Mr. Barrington’s eye, and scowled with incipient dislike. Though Mrs. Vallancy was sitting a

little apart from the other loungers in the verandah, Barrington was sufficiently near to have overheard her remark and the Premier's reply. An expression of amusement passed over the Englishman's face, as he mentally pictured a coarse, gaudily-dressed Antipodean belle, whose every gesture would inevitably offend against his refined European taste. His supercilious smile incensed Mr. Longleat still more deeply, and as Barrington turned away he asked angrily :

‘Who is that man?’

‘He is evidently a stranger,’ said Mrs. Vallancy.

‘A new chum going up to Lord Dolph’s,’ explained one of the bushmen.

‘I could have sworn that he was one of those cursed English swells,’ muttered Longleat; ‘we don’t want that brood out here. I’m pretty quick at guessing what a man is made of, and my first impressions don’t often deceive me. It’s instinct; and somehow I don’t cotton up to Lord Dolph’s new chum.’

The horses had by this time been put to the coach, and the driver, with the reins in his hand, was calling his passengers to mount.

Mr. Longleat helped Mrs. Vallancy to ascend, and took his place beside her in the back bench unoccupied by anyone else.

‘The box-seat has been reserved for you, sir,’ said the driver.

‘Never mind,’ answered Longleat. ‘I’ve got a lady to look after. I’ll sit here.’

Mrs. Vallancy cast upon him a look of ineffable gratitude; the other travellers clambered up; the coachman flicked his whip upon the horses’ backs, and the lumbering vehicle clattered off mid the shouts of the rapidly-dispersing mob.

‘Hooray for the Premier! Longleat and his railway for ever.’

## CHAPTER III.

## THE PREMIER'S STOREKEEPER.

BARRINGTON stood on the verandah of the inn and watched the coach till it was out of sight. Mr. Ferris, who had now emerged from the coffee-room, stole softly to the railings and sidled towards the Englishman, casting at the stranger furtive glances from his keen grey eyes, while with one lean hand he stroked his grizzled beard.

The sun was setting behind a range of distant hills. Storm-clouds were still threatening, and the deepening dusk had mellowed the glaring white of the limestone ridges into neutral grey, and had subdued into harmony the hard outlines and ungraceful colouring of the wooden and brick erections upon each side of the street.

'Not much of a view,' said Mr. Ferris, looking up in a bird-like way into Barrington's face; 'but picturesque in a manner of its own.'

'I suppose that one admires the landscape because it is unlike those with which one is familiar,' replied Barrington.

'European travellers say,' continued Mr. Ferris, 'that there are no striking features in Australian scenery. Bah! they cry—the eye wearies of endless gum-trees. But that is a mistake. Those who speak so have not penetrated into the heart of the country. Ah! we have mountains in the Koorong district, sublime with a wild grandeur that I have never seen equalled. It is nature—nature only which reconciles me to my exile.'

'You call your life here exile,' said Barrington. 'I presume that you are English? Have you lived for long in Australia?'

'Nine years,' replied Mr. Ferris. 'No,' he added, correcting himself, 'it will be ten next September. I find it difficult to calculate the course of time when the months are all alike, and when they are passed in forests and not in cities.'

'Yet to you, a lover of natural beauty, this ought not to be a hardship.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Ferris, with a grandiloquent air, 'I have my theories. Let the young seek inspiration in the woods, the aged in the breath of towns. There is a close link between nature and humanity. To glorify the one necessitates sympathy with the other. A poet pent up for life upon the fairest desert island would produce few stanzas worthy of immortality.'

'You mean,' said Barrington, 'that the ideal must be yoked to the practical, or inspiration becomes bathos. You yourself are an artist, perhaps?'

'I have indeed known the flutterings of enthusiasm, and have tasted the bitterness of unappreciated effort,' said Mr. Ferris, in a joyless, piping tone, with his eyes fixed upon the wooden verandah-post in mournful abstraction from his surroundings. 'Aspiration has been the keynote of my life. Failure, its refrain.'

'That is a melancholy experience,' said Barrington, in a sympathetic manner.

'How many are dowered with the yearnings of genius, and cursed with executive inability!' cried Mr. Ferris, almost fiercely. 'How many have lived too soon or too late! In how many has the divine fire been almost quenched in youth, and has emitted but a feeble flame in old age! But why do I talk of myself?' he added with a sudden deprecatory gesture. 'It is a morbid egotism that seeks vent in self-revelation to a passing stranger. Leichardt's Land only sees in me the shadow of her Premier's greatness. Anthony

Ferris, sir, at your service. Thomas Longleat's accountant, store-manager, indoor man of all work at Kooralbyn.' He waited a moment, then said: 'I glean that you are a new arrival in Australia, but I have not heard your name.'

'Barrington,' replied the Englishman, shortly.

'I knew a man of that name,' said Mr. Ferris in a tone of dismal retrospect, 'a long time ago—he was a friend of Edmund Kean. Poor Kean! He used to say, "If I had Barrington always with me, I should never go wrong!" Did you ever see Kean, sir?' he added with sharp enthusiasm. 'Ah! that was an actor! Such fire! such wit! I never knew Shakespeare till I knew Edmund Kean.'

'He was rather before my time,' said Barrington.

'True; you are a considerably younger man than I. But I have seen others more nearly your contemporaries. Macready—he was statuesque, and had studied—Charles Young, Kemble. I could criticise these, but Kean deprived me of the power of judgment. Shall I ever forget that slender man of diminutive stature and finely-chiselled features, whose piercing orbs held the spectator spellbound while he spoke? I saw him last in "The Merchant of Venice"—"*Signor Antonio . . .*"' quoted Mr. Ferris, in a low intense voice, with deep, dramatic intonation; then after repeating a few lines, he suffered his head to droop dejectedly upon his breast. 'I cannot do it,' he said; 'the manner has passed from me. 'I am getting **old**, and I forget . . . You saw Longleat just now?'

'Yes,' replied Barrington; 'I was interested, amused, by the excitement his arrival created.'

'People call him my patron. Thomas Longleat patron to *me*! There is a man who not many years ago was absolutely uneducated. *I* taught him all that he knows of the classics. *I* corrected his maiden speech in the Assembly, and now he jeers at me for a fool. It is such a man as that who suc-

ceeds in Australia. May I ask whether you are visiting the Antipodes from mere curiosity, or whether you have thoughts of becoming a cattle farmer ?

'I shall remain in Australia, if the life suits me,' replied Barrington.

'It will not. Settle your mind at once upon that score. You will be miserable, whether you make money or lose what you have. By-and-by you will acknowledge that I am a true prophet. To the refined Englishman, reared mid the associations of art, literature, music, the drama—accustomed to European luxury, and the charm of congenial society—Australia, if not a hell of discontent, must be a sink of degradation.'

'You speak strongly,' said Barrington, 'and certainly not encouragingly; but I imagine that a man of moderate calibre would be content to exist in a country which afforded him the opportunity for becoming wealthy.'

'Wealthy—yah!' snarled Anthony Ferris, in a manner indescribable upon paper. 'Money is, after all, but money's worth. For instance, what sort of occupation can there be to a man like me, in weighing sacks of flour, chronicling pounds of beef, and calculating roods of fencing? Is it not a suffocating, degrading slavery? And such, to you, will be the disgusting routine of station-life. Stock-riding or shepherding, branding or shearing. buying and selling, weariness of body and slow atrophy of intellect. You are not young enough to anticipate compensating wealth; when, if it comes, you will have lost the capacity for enjoyment. Excuse my curiosity—are you married?'

'No,' replied Barrington.

'You will then lack the incentive of working for a beloved object, which sweetens toil to me. I dare say that the uneducated would consider my lot enviable. I have abundance to eat and drink—a comfortable house to live in; I

am putting by for the benefit of my child'—Ferris's face softened curiously—'nevertheless, you see before you a disappointed man.'

'May I ask in what particular line you were unsuccessful?' asked Barrington.

'There was none. My ambition was boundless ; it embraced every phase of art. Vague aspiration has been my curse. I had not courage or patience to continue struggling against fate. Had I possessed Longleat's insensitive nature I might have succeeded.'

'Mr. Longleat is also English by birth?' asked Barrington, curiously.

An odd, malignant smile passed over Mr. Ferris's face.

'Yes, English by birth, certainly. Good-afternoon, Tom Dungie,' he added, addressing the mailman, who had approached the verandah-railing. 'What is the news up Dyraaba way?'

'It's you that ought to tell us the news, Mr. Ferris,' said Dungie. 'Folks say that Dyson Maddox is to be the new Minister for Lands, and that he is to marry Miss Longleat. Is it true, do you think, sir?'

'It's not unlikely,' said Mr. Ferris. 'Miss Longleat is a lady of caprices. She may be seized with the caprice for matrimony. I dare say, I dare say ; and I wish it might be true ; but I have not been informed upon the subject.'

'Well,' squeaked Dungie, in his nasal tones ; 'I'm sure I wish Mr. Maddox joy of his bargain. She's a handsome young woman ; and if she's got nought else, she's got brass. They do say as she is rare winnin'. Gells with tin-mines at their backs don't grow like wild cherries, with the stones outside ready to be picked for the stretching.' Tom Dungie always chuckled audibly after uttering what he considered a sharp speech. 'Folks tell,' he whispered mysteriously, 'that the young woman with the black eyes—her that sat beside

the Premier on the coach—is a rum sort, and that he has got pretty thick with her lately. Do you think he's hit?

'That's a married woman,' said Mr. Ferris; 'her husband is in the Council.'

'Marriage ain't no security,' remarked Dungie, reflectively. 'I've heard said that 'twur like drinking a glass of doctored grog: directly you've swallowed one, yer mouth begins to parch for another—and that's the way with women of a sort; there's some of 'em as can't get on without men. She warn't nought to look at, though: it's colour as takes me: but a man mostly fancies his opposite, and Longleat has got enough red for two. I wur told to look out for a gentleman from England,' added Dungie, making a lurch in Barrington's direction. 'The lord at Dyraaba sent a 'ack down and a pack 'oss for the swag. I said as I'd show the gentleman the short cut, which is pretty stiff for a new chum.'

'Do you mean Lord Adolphus Bassett?' asked Barrington.

'Oh! that's his name, is it? Some folks calls him Mr. Bassett, and some Mr. Dolph, and other folks Lord Dolph. I never knowed rightly which it wur, and it ain't of much odds.'

'I knew him in England,' said Barrington, 'and I'm going to stay with him now. Does he live far from here?'

'Nigh upon forty mile. I shall start at daybreak with my mails. Can you ride, sir?'

'Yes,' answered Barrington, laughing.

'I asked because new chums don't, mostly. Didn't know whether you'd be able to keep up with the little piebald. She's a rare un to go, she is. That there lord ain't much of a hand with a buck-jumper, but my lady, lor! she can sit like Old Nick. Well, you'll hear me calling in the morning,' added Dungie, affably; and with another bow, which was accomplished by laying his hands upon the pit of his



stomach, and bending forward as far as the laws of balance would permit, he walked away.

Presently a bell rang in the coffee-room, and all who had remained in the hotel flocked in to a somewhat nondescript evening meal. There was a smoking joint at one end of the table, a tin teapot at the other, and bread, butter and vegetables were placed promiscuously down the sides. Two women, who were respectively Mrs. Braysher and her maid-of-all-work, waited.

The bushmen—rough specimens of humanity—congregated together. Barrington and Mr. Ferris took their seats a little apart from the rest of the company. There was very little conversation while the meal was in progress. The men were hungry, and plied their knives and forks vigorously, washing down the tough beef and hard bread with copious draughts of tea. Mr. Ferris, who had taken his stimulant beforehand, likewise drank tea. Barrington called for a pint of sherry, and was brought a muddy decoction, which he tasted, made a wry face, and set down.

‘Don’t drink wine in Australia,’ said Mr. Ferris; ‘it is bad. Take to spirits; that is the way with most Englishmen. You’ll start with theories about colonial wine. I did; but, like me, you’ll find that they are a delusion. There is a good wine made in the south; but till the inter-colonial duty is abolished it will never become the national drink. Brandy is cheaper. So we ruin our nervous systems with strong tea, and our digestions by promiscuous nips. You will be asked a dozen times in the day to “come and have a nip;” and if you are weak-minded, as I am, you’ll yield till you find that without a stimulant you are a poor creature. The higher your mental calibre, the more you’ll drink. It is Longleat’s boast that he is temperate. Yah! a fig for temperance when a man has the frame of a Hercules and the insusceptibility of a bullock-driver! You don’t seem

to have much appetite. I see that you have been accustomed to a different style of cooking. If you have finished we will sit out in the verandah. There's a storm in the west, but its strength will be spent before it reaches Kooya. The thunder has cooled the air already, and we shall be able to smoke in comparative comfort.'

Mr. Ferris led the way to the verandah, and pulled two arm-chairs to a breezy corner. He then produced his leather tobacco-pouch and a short black pipe, and began to smoke, drawing deep breaths, as though he enjoyed the narcotism, the soft air and the fading light, while every now and then he uttered in a snarling, neutral tone, some discursive remark upon Australian customs, or sneering allusion to his master. He seemed a man oppressed by an immense burden of discontent.

The verandah was almost empty. Most of the bushmen had taken up their hats and had gone out. There was a circus performing in a neighbouring street, and the attraction, weighed even against the charms of the coffee-room, was too potent to be resisted. Every now and then shrill bursts of laughter, and the braying of musical instruments, sounded through the murky night, of which the darkness was at regular intervals illuminated by flashes of sheet-lightning in the west.

'You have lately come from England,' said Mr. Ferris, edging a little closer to his companion. 'I dare say that you have lived in London, eh?'

'Yes,' said Barrington with a short laugh; 'I'm very well acquainted with London.'

'You've seen the best in the world then. There's no place like London, except perhaps Paris. Lord!' peering with his little grey eyes into Barrington's face, 'that's what I call *life*. Balzac and Paul de Kock, eh? I dare say now that you know all the club gossip and theatrical scandal. I

like a spice of the devil ; it's piquant, it's refreshing. Now it would interest me to hear who are the newest singers and actors, and the painters who have become famous since I was in England. I might perhaps recognise familiar names. I used to be considered a good critic in my day. At Kooralbyn I have a few gems, slight things, done for me by comparatively insignificant artists, in whom I saw the germs of future eminence. If you are a lover of art, I shall be happy at some time to show you the sketches.'

Barrington thanked the old man, and, humouring his fancy, talked on with the air of one to whom the subject was familiar, of the latest operas, the last Academy, the newest scandals in the fashionable and artistic world, the gossip of the clubs and theatres, while every now and then Mr. Ferris would interrupt him with some eager question which showed how deeply he was interested.

'And you have left all this!' he exclaimed at length. 'You have deliberately chosen a life of toil and discomfort amidst the wilds of Australia in preference to one of refined enjoyment in England! You surprise me.'

'My visit is only an experiment,' said Barrington ; 'I have not yet determined to remain in Australia.'

'Excuse me,' said Mr. Ferris, with hesitating curiosity ; 'something in your manner and bearing leads me to suppose that you have been in the army ; am I right ?'

'I was in the Guards,' replied Barrington, incautiously. A moment later he regretted his want of reticence.

'The Guards,' repeated Ferris. 'I am more than ever astonished that you can entertain, even as an experiment, the idea of living in Australia.'

'I am no longer in the army,' said Barrington, curtly ; and added, in a manner that left no room for further questioning : 'I think you said that you knew Lord Dolph Bassett ?'

'He has a selection down the Koorong, about fifteen miles from Kooralbyn.'

'Kooralbyn is the name of Mr. Longleat's property?' asked Barrington, anxious to divert the conversation from himself. 'A native word, I presume?'

'Meaning the "abode of serpents." Certain poetic swains have dubbed Miss Longleat the Enchantress of Kooralbyn, and, in a confusion of classical metaphors, have addressed her in sonnets as Medusa and Circe. Apart from its feminine attraction, Kooralbyn is worth a visit. The country is wild, picturesque, inspiring. It might be the refuge of a Timon, or the dreamland of a poet. Come over and see it. But you err in using the word *property*. In your acceptance of the term, there is no property in Australia. The owner of freehold is the petty agriculturist, the representative of a lower order of settler than the squatter. The bloated aristocrat is he who leases from the Crown, and whose rich pastures are only his own till a new land law, a mine, or a railway turns a horde of free selectors loose upon his borders. Mr. Longleat professes impartiality and sympathy with all classes. It is his political creed, and he finds that it brings him in popularity. Lord Dolph took up land on Kooralbyn. Longleat smiled grimly, and offered to help him brand his cattle. They are the best of friends, but at first the squatterarchy of the Koorong rose up in a body and named its hero, martyr.'

'Lord Dolph, then, is a free selector?'

'He cattle-farms a few thousand acres after an amateur fashion. My lady breaks in the horses and takes care that the calves are branded. It is said that she has an eye to business, and does not disdain nuggeting.\* She was a Koorong girl, a sonsie Scotch lassie, and he married her

\* To *nugget*: in Australian slang, to appropriate your neighbours' unbranded calves.

because he was told that it was the correct thing for a bushman to have a wife. He builds rustic bridges, fancies pigs and poultry, plays the piano, and poses as a squatter in moleskins and a cabbage-tree hat. She manages the farm.'

'A fair division of labour,' returned Barrington.

'You will find it dull at Dyraaba,' continued Mr. Ferris; 'and Lord Dolph will probably propose a visit to Kooralbyn. Mr. Longleat will be in Leichardt's Town occupied with political matters, unless, indeed, the Ministry goes out at the beginning of the session. I shall, however, be charmed to introduce you to my wife and daughter. You may, or may not, see Miss Longleat; that will be as the caprice takes her.'

'Your allusions to this young lady pique my curiosity. Is the Enchantress of Kooralbyn a person indeed out of the common; or is she merely a pretty rustic, spoiled by flattery?'

'Rustic!' repeated Mr. Ferris, chuckling softly to himself. 'I dare say that you have seen some of the most beautiful women in Europe; nevertheless, you will certainly admire Honoria Longleat. A fine piece of flesh, with money to enhance her charms.'

'She is an only child, then?'

'No; Mr. Longleat has been twice married. His first wife, the mother of Honoria, was a beautiful drab, whom I believe he picked up at the Diggings. His second was the daughter of a squatter on the Ubi Ubi. She died at the birth of a girl, her only one, now a child of seven. The Premier's matrimonial arrangements and my own have been curiously similar. I also have had two wives; my second is still living. I have my theories, sir, upon marriage as upon other subjects. I consider a carefully-discriminated diversity the important element in the generation of a perfect type. Since I could not succeed in making a mark in

the world, I was determined to beget a celebrity. I chose my wife upon physiological principles. The result would have been all that could have been desired had she presented me with a son. Mrs. Ferris has failed in the one duty which I required of her. You see, disappointment is my doom.'

'But, Miss Longleat's fortune?' suggested Barrington, recalling the old man to his own point of interest.

'True! When Honoria, Longleat's eldest daughter, was a baby in arms, old Jem Bagot, a ticket-of-leave man, and the Premier's pal when they drove bullock-teams together between Leichardt's Town and Kooya, left her a bit of land in the Tarrangella district, which was then considered of little value. This bit of land is now the great Tarrangella tin mine, bringing in somewhere about four thousand per annum.'

'And is this fortune absolutely her own?' asked Barrington, excitedly.

'It will be, absolutely, upon the day that she is twenty-one. At present the income is accumulating for her benefit. Oh, she is a great heiress. There's Kooralbyn and Mumdubbera, the valley of the Leichardt, the house in Leichardt's Town, and the Lord knows how many political pickings, to be divided between her and little Janie. And she is her father's favourite. A fine thing to be transported in the old days, eh? if a man had brains and luck. A fine thing for a woman to be handsome and rich. What does it matter if her father was a bullock-driver, and her mother—' Mr. Ferris shrugged his shoulders significantly. 'In polite society nobody asks any embarrassing questions. There's only one thing in the world better than money and beauty, and that's genius. I have a daughter too, Mr. Barrington, and I am as proud of her as Longleat is of his, but in a different way—a very different way.'

‘Miss Ferris is talented, perhaps?’ said Barrington.

‘My Angela will be a great artist,’ said Mr. Ferris, lifting his head with a sublimity of conviction that amused while it silenced his companion. ‘Sir,’ he added, with a kind of proud humility, ‘I know my weakness; I know my failings. The soul of genius was born with me, but not the power of fulfilment. I have prayed that I might be the father of an artist who should combine inspiration and execution. Do I not know the ecstasy of vision, and the hell of inability? I said to myself, ‘I will beget a son who shall be great.’ Two generations could not be foredoomed to failure. Instead of a son, a daughter was born to me—a frail creature, visionary and mystical, with an extraordinary development of the creative faculty. From the day that, as a child, she drew upon the floor and wall rough sketches with a piece of chalk, I devoted her to the cause of art. Nature has been her nurse. Cradled in the lap of inspiration, she has led an ideal life among woods and mountains. It is for her sake that I labour; for her sake that I submit to insult and degradation. I have saved a thousand pounds to be expended upon her artistic education. In a year’s time I shall take her to Italy; in ten, the name of Ferris will be renowned.’

Barrington listened in amused toleration of the old man’s tall talk. He no more believed in Angela Ferris’s genius than he believed in Honoria Longleat’s beauty; yet he felt a languid interest in both subjects, and would have liked to pursue them. Clearly there was a covert antagonism between Ferris and his patron; and being an observer of human nature, in default of better occupation, Barrington was ready to follow up the current of jealousy and crabbed conceit to its source. The old man, however, rose abruptly.

‘You seem a link between my former life and the present. Your companionship has excited me beyond my wont, and

I have talked of matters which are purely personal. Pray attach no importance to my wandering speech. I am a soured old man. Now, I have smoked out my pipe, and the storm is threatening closely. There has been heavy rain in Leichardt's Town. I'll say good-night. You start early to-morrow morning, but we shall meet ere long at Kooralbyn.'

Mr. Ferris shuffled indoors to the coffee-room, and thence to bed.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE WEAVING OF THE SPELL.

THE coach rattled on beyond the outskirts of Kooya, past plantations of pine-apples and bananas, and pretty wooden cottages embedded in orange-groves and vineyards, till cultivation and even clearing ceased, and hedges of cactus and acacia, or rough stockading that divided the settlers' paddocks from the road, gave place to monotonous forests of she-oak and eucalyptus, where there was the brooding stillness of a coming storm. At intervals the driver paused before a bush inn, of which, at long distances apart, there were several standing solitary among the trees, to change horses, call for the mail, or give the passengers an opportunity of descending for refreshment. The night closed in; a murky cloud grew black overhead, and occasional growlings of thunder told that the storm was advancing.

Mrs. Vallancy and Mr. Longleat were practically alone in the hinder part of the coach, and their *tête-à-tête*, carried on under cover of the rattling of bolts and springs, the flapping of curtains and general din of motion, was inaudible to the men in front.

'How kind of you it was to give up the box-seat and come here to amuse me,' said Mrs. Vallancy in her pathetic



monotone. 'It would have been too horrid had I been placed beside any of our companions. I can never be sufficiently grateful to Providence for sending you to Leichardt's Town this evening.'

'I do not like to think that you often travel by yourself in this way,' said Longleat.

'I do not *often* travel by myself,' replied she, mimicking his tone, 'only when necessity obliges me, as is the case to-night. I thought that you admired independent women. You have certainly said so,' she added, alluding to one of his public speeches in which he had advocated female labour in certain Government departments.

'The women I meant aren't of your sort. There's things which drag down both sexes alike, and both should be on the same ground. I should like to see all women taught to work for their bread. When I meet one with the pluck to take her own line, and fight against poverty and prejudice, I respect her for it; but it cuts me to the quick to see a young, timid, and, if you'll excuse my saying it, pretty creature like you, who has the right to look for protection from others, jostled about in this way. You should not travel alone at night in a public conveyance like Cobb's. You lay yourself open to—to——'

'Unpleasant remark,' she said, concluding his stammering sentence. 'Yes, I understand; you are right: but it is not my fault—you ought to know that I dislike it. If you were my—my father let us say—you would not allow me to go about like this. But you are not my father. I have no one to take care of me—except my husband. I am married, yet there is no one more solitary than I am. The world is hard to me. I am thrown upon outsiders for sympathy and support. And because two or three friends who happen to be men give these to me, society judges me cruelly. Is it not so?'

Mrs. Vallancy turned her large eyes upon Mr. Longleat

with a frank, confiding expression of which she was mistress. He was regarding her fixedly, but as their eyes met, he abruptly withdrew his gaze ; and turned his face away without answering her plaintive question.

Given a nascent interest, rapidly deepening into a powerful predilection, and an unconventional combination of circumstances, which places the admirer in close propinquity with the object of his attraction, it will depend entirely upon the man's idiosyncrasy whether the position inspires deference or awakens passion.

In the case of the typical gentleman, that chivalrous loyalty which is as much inherent as the result of education, forbids the merest suggestion of license ; but the man of coarse fibre and rude training, who has made it his creed to seize opportunity for the furtherance of ambition or the accomplishment of desire, and who is ignorant of the subtle definitions of a refined code of honour, though he may accurately limit his intentions, has less control over his emotions. Such a man does not analyse his inner feelings. There are in his nature no softening shadows, nor can he comprehend the imperceptible blending of passive interest with active regard. With him the machinery of passion comes into sudden play, and startles by the violent effect it produces.

Mr. Longleat sat silent for some moments, taking no notice of several discursive observations with which she sought to relieve his embarrassment. He felt shy of addressing her, and tried to steer his thoughts into more impersonal channels. He endeavoured to direct them towards the political conflict in store for him, which for months past had held his nerves in a state of tension. In the estimation of the inhabitants of Leichardt's Town the coming session was merely a pleasant stimulus to excitement, and the present determinant of a railway that must sooner or later be built.

To Longleat, it meant the crowning act of his career, upon which rested the balance of victory or defeat. It was the climax of a struggle for supremacy involving his dearest ambitions and affections.

The least poetic man who has succeeded in life is conscious at times of a vein of romance permeating a temperament that he has been proud to style 'matter of fact.' It is the perception of the ideal side by side with the actual, that gives courage to encounter and surmount difficulties. He who is devoid of imagination rarely accomplishes a great enterprise. A man may scoff at superstition and yet have a dim consciousness of occult influence at work upon his destiny. At this moment Mr. Longleat felt a curious presentiment that he was approaching a crisis in his fate, and that Mrs. Vallancy, whose presence affected him so strongly, had unknowingly identified herself with his failure or success.

As they drove on through the deepening darkness, a sense of unreality oppressed him, and it seemed to him that he was being whirled in a dream through an enchanted forest to a destination of which he was ignorant. At last, ashamed and annoyed at his unusual susceptibility, Mr. Longleat started forward and pulled himself together, uttering an ironical 'Pshaw!'

'What is the matter?' asked Mrs. Vallancy.

'Nothing. By the way, I hear that Mr. Fielding has sailed for Melbourne.'

'He left Leichardt's Town last week by the mail-boat,' replied Mrs. Vallancy, with a perceptible alteration in her voice.

'Is it true that you went down to the Bay to see him off?'

'Yes. My husband was with me. Was there any harm in that?'

‘I suppose not,’ answered Mr. Longleat. Then added in a tone of displeasure, ‘You were very friendly with Fielding when he was in Leichardt’s Town.’

‘Are you, too, going to cavil at my friendships?’ said Mrs. Vallancy, plaintively. ‘I had fancied, though indeed I can hardly tell why, for we have known each other but a short time, that I could always count upon kindness from you.’

‘I need not tell you that you may always count upon that,’ replied Mr. Longleat. ‘Will you not say—friendship?’

‘What could one desire more than kindness? If I asked anything else, I should beg that you would put aside any feeling of animosity you may entertain towards my husband, and that you would come and see me sometimes. You have not been within my doors.’

‘I—I have not ventured,’ stammered Longleat, who had alternations of boldness and timidity; ‘but if I may see you home after your journey—’

‘My husband will probably meet me at the Australasian when the coach arrives,’ said Mrs. Vallancy, ‘but if not, I shall gratefully take advantage of your offer. Ah!’ she cried, ‘what a vivid flash! I am as weak as a baby in thunder and lightning. I can only hide my face and tremble.’

‘There’s a storm coming up,’ said Longleat, ‘but it is from the mildest quarter, and will soon be over. Do not be frightened.’

‘I cannot help feeling terrified. Of course I know that the chances are a thousand to one against any harm befalling me; the terror is partly from association. When I was a child, my nurse used to keep me good during a thunder-storm by telling me that God was angry, and still I cannot

overcome the uneasy sense that some one who has no sympathy with my weaknesses is scolding me mightily.'

Then came another flash, followed by an angry concussion, and she cowered back, laying her trembling hand upon Mr. Longleat's arm.

Presently she asked :

'Are you ever angry with your daughter?'

'Angry with Honoria! By Jove, no! She has a spice of the Tartar in her composition, and would not stand being scolded. She takes her own way. I dare say it is fortunate for us both that her will does not often clash with mine.'

'And when it pulls her in a contrary direction to that which you wish, you turn and let her lead you?'

'No,' replied Longleat, gruffly. 'In some matters I am a fool where my daughter is concerned, but for all that, I'm master of myself.'

'She must be very happy,' continued Mrs. Vallancy, plaintively. 'When I was quite young I had my own way too. I used to think that I needed only to ask in order to get what I wanted; but since I married I have found life different. After all, we white women are no better off than the lubras;\* we are sold like them, and then we have to walk behind our lords and bear their burdens.'

Now the storm broke in quick, angry claps of thunder and vivid flashes of forked lightning, which illuminated the coach in momentary gleams, and showed the frightened leaders, as, snorting and plunging, they turned wildly in their traces.

'Who-oo!' shouted the driver, as he cut the animals sharply with his whip. 'What are you shying at now?'

The coach rattled on over a wooden bridge, while the rain descended in heavy drops that penetrated the ill-constructed awning.

\* Young aboriginal woman.

'Oh dear!' sighed Mrs. Vallancy, 'I'm getting so wet.'

Mr. Longleat unstrapped his poncho and placed it round her shoulders, then with one hand held down the flapping curtains in order to protect her somewhat from the driving shower. A strong wind had succeeded the late stillness, and blew upon their faces, bearing an exhilarating sense of coolness. Gradually the thunder became fainter, and the lightning less brilliant; the storm was passing over, and the passengers in front began to talk again about politics and crops and cattle—conversation in which at any other time the Premier would have joined with interest, but which to-night resembled in his mind the refrain of a vivid dream.

Soon the wind and rain ceased; the sky became clear and blue; the Southern Cross rose gem-like above the horizon; and the moon shone brightly. The horses were brisk again, and the coach splashed heavily through the pools left by the storm; the clammy heat had given place to a delicious feeling of freshness and moisture; the air was fragrant with the perfume of wild-flowers and scented gum; and myriads of insects, silenced during the day by the choking dust, filled the night with inarticulate murmurings.

The houses along the road became more numerous, and the lights of Leichardt's Town shone, one by one, like stars through the trees. The bush merged imperceptibly into a straggling street, and the coach paused for a moment to pay toll at a bridge which spanned the Leichardt River. The stream, here about a quarter of a mile wide, and with scarcely a ripple upon its leaden surface, rolled between low wharf-lined banks and green gardens towards the sea. The lights of small craft, dotted here and there, seemed like reflections from the sky above; and the moon shed her beams across the track of a ferry-boat that plied monotonously to and fro. Over the water there was a faint, distant buzz; but here, the tinkle of the steamer bells, and the

voices of the boatmen calling to waiting passengers, 'Hoi-ahoi-o-ovër,' were the only distinct sounds in the deep stillness.

The coach drove slowly across the bridge into the city proper. Here the streets were wide and well-built, the shops gaily lighted, and the traffic considerable. Now the driver pulled up before a large hotel in the principal thoroughfare.

A little crowd had collected about the verandah; the passengers alighted, and the Premier assisted Mrs. Vallancy to the ground. She gazed helplessly about her.

'I cannot see my husband,' she said. 'Since he is not here I will gratefully avail myself of your escort—at least to the ferry.'

The Premier hailed a passing jingle. He placed Mrs. Vallancy and her luggage upon the back seat of this ill-balanced vehicle, and stationing himself in front with the driver, gave the order, 'To the Emu Point, Upper Ferry.'

Leichardt's Town is curiously situated upon three peninsulas, lying parallel with each other, and formed by the snake-like curves of the river which divides them. The city lies in the middle, and is called the north side in contradistinction to South Leichardt's Town, with which it is connected by a bridge, while Emu Point, the suburb where Mrs. Vallancy lived, faces it again on the opposite bank. It will be readily seen that, whereas to follow the windings of the river would necessitate a journey of some miles, by taking the ferry three times in a direct line, the distance from one side of the town to the other might be rendered comparatively slight.

The site has much natural beauty to recommend it. Like a broad blue band the Leichardt flows between undulating stretches of lightly-wooded country. Here and there, beyond the line of wharves and stores, the banks rise rocky and precipitous, and overgrown with ferns and the variegated

latarna ; but mostly slope gently to the water's edge in gardens and grassy pastures, fringed with mangrove ; while in the suburbs white roads wind among clumps of feathery bamboos, or by acacia hedges, which bound pretty villas and verandahed cottages. In the distant west there lies a low range of hills, which shuts out the view of the river ; to the east the broadening stream hurries downward to the sea.

The lower part of the middle point, to which Mr. Longleat and Mrs. Vallancy were at this time driving, is intersected by a long street, at one end of which lies a ferry, while at the other the Parliamentary Chambers, comprised in an imposing stone structure of the modern nondescript style of architecture, overlook the river and South Leichardt's Town. The extremity of the point is divided into two allotments. In one of these stands Government House, surrounded by its trim lawns and shrubberies. The other is laid out in parterres, grass-plots, and cool walks, overshadowed by flowering mimosæ, palms, and bunya-trees. These gardens are always open for public resort. Opposite them, the river-bank rises high and rocky, and is crowned by villas overgrown with creepers, and commanding a view of the whole town. Here Mrs. Vallancy lived.

Near the Houses of Parliament, encroaching, as it were, upon the public pleasure-grounds, and divided from them by a screen of bamboo-trees, there is an enclosure in which at that time stood Mr. Longleat's town-house. It was a two-storied building, with green venetian shutters and a deep verandah, and was hidden from the street by clumps of oleanders and two giant Moreton Bay fig-trees.

But Mr. Longleat and his companion, driving straight towards the ferry, passed considerably to the left of this house, which lay almost the length of the street behind them, when, after dismissing their jingle, they stood upon the



wooden ferry steps, and waited till the splash of oars announced the return of the boat.

They seated themselves at the stern, and were rowed across the river. The boatman talked freely as he leisurely dipped his oars. His name was Pettit, and he was a well-known character in Leichardt's Town. He spoke in a precise, dogmatic manner, and moved a pair of toothless jaws in a rapid and discursive monologue.

Yes, there *had* been a heavy storm—but it made no odds to *him*; wet or dry, it was his business to pull across that 'ere darned river; and there was folks as swore if the boat warn't at one crossing, and cussed wuss if it warn't at the other. . . . He didn't want to name no names, but there wur a gent living not very far up the Emu Point hill, as wur sometimes a bit tight, and most often waxy. He wished now that the House was going to sit, that this 'ere gent, who was a member of the Council, would go and strike his diggings at the other side. And if Longleat, he added, unconscious of the identity of his passenger, would get another bridge built, instead of making a railway that wur only good for squatters and free selectors, why *he*, for one, wouldn't cry out.

Mr. Longleat paid the toll of pence, and offered Mrs. Vallancy his arm, to aid her in ascending the steep hill. The road was rough and the dwellings scattered, and there was no light but that of the moon to guide them along the straggling street, wet with the late downpour. They walked up the rugged footpath, her occasional stumbles and clinging hold deepening Mr. Longleat's sense of protection, while in his breast rose a strong feeling of indignation against the supine indifference of Mr. Vallancy, who had permitted his wife to make so late a journey unattended, and who, by failing to meet her at the stopping-place of the coach, had

left her to the tender mercy of any chance traveller who might offer his escort across the river.

Longleat's thoughts found vent in words.

'It is not right,' he said impulsively, 'that you should be left to shift for yourself in this way. . . . Suppose that I—that I had not been travelling down from Kooya this evening, what would have become of you?'

'I should have arrived in Leichardt's Town in the most commonplace manner,' replied Mrs. Vallancy lightly, though there was a tremor in her voice which did not fail to deepen his compassion. 'Then, not finding my husband at the Australasian, I should have taken a fly to the ferry. Pettit would have been delighted to offer me his protection. I should have procured the escort of a little boy from the Ferry House, and should have reached home in perfect safety. Oh! I am accustomed to taking care of myself. There are not many knights-errant in Australia, Mr. Longleat, and I have looked too long on the dark side of human nature to expect, under any circumstances, to find that men are actuated by chivalrous impulses. I should at first have felt shy and extremely uncomfortable, and the storm would have frightened me horribly; afterwards I should have looked at the situation from a philosophic point of view, and should probably have listened with a deep, personal interest to the political conversation of the men in front of me. I now feel myself quite in a position to judge of the advantages of your projected railway. . . . I suppose,' she went on, 'that you will soon be in the thick of your Parliamentary battle. I used to feel glad when the Session opened. While the House is sitting I am left more alone, and have greater liberty to do as I please. That is a bad speech for a wife to make, is it not? But you understand me; and why should I play the hypocrite when all the world knows so well what I must feel? Now I shall be rather sorry when the conflict

begins, for I have learned to look upon you as a friend, and politics will keep us apart.'

'I do not see why that should be,' said Longleat.

'You and my husband belong to antagonistic factions.'

'That need not make any difference to you and me. Look here, Mrs. Vallancy; I'm not the man to brag about my own doings, but it's a fact that I should not have worked up to the top of the tree if I hadn't stuck staunch to my friends, irrespective of faction. It is not because your husband is on Middleton's side that I—that I——' he stammered, hardly daring to finish the sentence which had almost escaped him.

'That you dislike him,' added Mrs. Vallancy, softly. 'I know—I know—I'm afraid that he is not—popular. . . . I wish,' she exclaimed impulsively, then hesitated—'I wish that he was not in the Council.' She paused, uncertain of her ground, then boldly tried to frame in words the thought which during the drive from Kooya had been uppermost in her mind: 'If he had some regular employment which would bring him in money and furnish him with a vent for his energies. . . . We are very poor; we are deeply in debt. *I* bear the burden of it all. I am a miserable woman. . . . It would make me so much happier if——*You* could help me to become happier.'

'I don't see how that is possible,' said Longleat, looking down upon her, and not exactly apprehending her meaning. 'I cannot rid you of an incubus, as I would do if I had the power. Tell me in what way I can help you. If I *can* do anything for you, you have only got to ask me.'

'Suppose,' said Mrs. Vallancy, emboldened by his manner, and turning her eyes towards his face as they walked on together—'suppose that I were to ask you to give my husband an appointment—a police magistrate's post, perhaps

—work which would take him away from Leichardt's Town  
—from temptations.'

The Premier started as though he had been stung, and Mrs. Vallancy felt in a moment that she had overshot her mark.

'You need not be afraid,' she exclaimed, in a bantering tone; 'I would not for the world tamper even by suggestion with Ministerial policy—I know that subject is sacred. Don't rebuke me too severely for my boldness; I could not bear to fall under your wrath. But, apart from joking, I thought that it was considered diplomatic to buy off an opponent.'

'That may be the creed of some politicians,' said Longleat, excitedly; 'it isn't mine. I've kep' my hands clean since the day I took my seat upon the Treasury bench. My worst enemy can't say agen me that I've ever given away a Government place to curry favour with an adversary or to pay a friend. I'm glad that you call it joking, Mrs. Vallancy. It 'ud cut my heart to refuse you anything that you asked for serious; but I couldn't do that.'

'Promise me that you'll think no more of it,' she urged; 'I couldn't bear to feel that you were angry with me.'

'It wouldn't be possible for me to be angry with you,' he said. 'There are—there might be other ways of helping you, if you'd let me name them.'

'We have reached my cottage,' she said, pausing before a wicket-gate, which gave access to a dim-looking garden situated upon the brow of the hill. 'You will come and see me soon, and tell me what is in your mind. Won't you come in now? Oh yes! my husband will be glad to know,' she added, with a touch of sarcasm in her tone, 'that I have been so efficiently escorted from the Australasian.'

Mr. Longleat hesitated for a moment, then entered.

## CHAPTER V.

## MRS. VALLANCY'S HOME.

MRS. VALLANCY and Mr. Longleat walked up the narrow path leading to the house and stepped on to the verandah, which was wide and breezy, and upon one side overlooked the river. The wooden posts were festooned by trailing creeper, through which the moonbeams shed quivering shadows upon the boards; and without, the shrubs of heliotrope and purple magnolia that bordered the grass-plot made the night air heavy with perfume.

Mrs. Vallancy softly tried one of the venetian shutters, then finding that it did not yield to her touch, rang a little bell that hung against the wall.

Presently a maid opened the French window, and Mrs. Vallancy led the way into the drawing-room, a pretty room, encumbered with furniture, unoccupied, and dimly lighted by a shaded lamp, which was placed upon a small table near the fireplace. There was a door upon the opposite side of the apartment, which was closed.

'Is your master at home?' asked Mrs. Vallancy.

'I think, ma'am, that he is smoking in the dining-room,' was the reply.

Mrs. Vallancy motioned Mr. Longleat to a seat, opened the inner door, and passed into the next room, where she faced her husband.

He was an unprepossessing-looking man, tall and rakish, with a shambling gait and dissipated appearance, yet with the indefinable stamp of gentility upon his features and clothes. Mr. Vallancy's income was known to be almost nominal, nevertheless he was always well-dressed, played high, had loose cash, drank expensive wines in no small

quantity, and, though he kept but a small number of servants, lived luxuriously.

'What the deuce was all that tomfoolery about the Ansons?' was his greeting to his wife; 'and why didn't you come home when you first intended?'

'They wished me to remain, and I did not suppose that my absence made any difference to you. They nursed me, and were kind to me. You seem to forget, Edward, that I am not strong, and that I need consideration,' said Mrs. Vallancy; and Mr. Longleat, in the next room, remarked the defiant tone of her voice.

'It would be strange if I forgot it. You are always wanting a change and posing as an injured innocent. Your ill-health is entirely owing to your abominable temper. I think that it is time you came back, though when you are at home you make yourself so deucedly unpleasant that I am glad to be rid of you.'

'I expected that you would meet me at Kooya,' she said, resentfully.

'You might have known better. I have not the money to travel about the country at your pleasure.'

'You have generally money to do what you like,' she retorted in a low tone. 'Take care what you say: there is some one in the drawing-room.'

'Whom have you got here now?'

'As I was alone, Mr. Longleat, who travelled with me in the coach, was kind enough to accompany me from the Australasian,' said Mrs. Vallancy, in a louder tone, as she threw open the door behind her, and Longleat, feeling somewhat uncomfortable, rose and advanced towards the husband and wife.

'How do you do?' said Mr. Vallancy sulkily, shaking hands with his political foe. 'It's very hot this evening. The storm don't seem to have cleared the air much.'

‘The thunder is still hovering about,’ said Mr. Longleat. ‘I think that I ought to be going across the water again. I only wanted to see Mrs. Vallancy safe within doors. It’s getting late, and I’ve had a long journey from Kooralbyn.’

‘You’re down for the Opening, I suppose,’ said Vallancy. ‘You’ll find no end of fellows at the club. Have something before you go. Connie, why the deuce don’t you see that there’s ice in the house?’

‘I do not care about anything, thank you,’ replied Mr. Longleat, hastily. ‘Nothing, I beg. I must really be off. Good-night. Good-night, Mrs. Vallancy.’

‘I’ll let you out,’ she said, moving on before him.

She held the door open for him to pass through, then closed it behind them both. When they had reached the verandah, she paused, and timidly touched his arm.

‘You’ll come again soon,’ she said. ‘You see I want friends; I’m nearly always at home in the afternoons. Come in a day or two—before Parliament opens.’

‘Yes, I’ll come,’ said Mr. Longleat, forgetting, under the influence of the moment, a prudent resolve that he had made in the verandah.

‘Connie!’ called Vallancy, from within.

‘Good-bye,’ she murmured, waving her hand lightly; then re-entered the dining-room, where her husband had seated himself at the table.

‘Give me a kiss,’ he said. ‘I’m glad to see you home again. I wish you’d look happier. I’ve had cursed bad luck at cards to-night, and I was annoyed because you never wrote to me from the Ansons. If I had known that Longleat was in the next room, I should not have spoken to you so angrily.’

‘What does it matter? it is nothing new,’ she said, without moving to grant him the embrace for which he had asked.

Her apathy showed no trace of resentment. He looked at her for a moment with an expression half ironical, half despairing ; then sullenly drooped his head upon his breast. Presently he asked suddenly : ' Where is the brandy ? Get me some, if you please.'

' I would not take any more, if I were you,' she replied coldly.

' If you were me, and had business matters to worry you, you'd be glad enough to take something which would help you to forget them. Bring me something strong. I'm tired ; I cannot drink this wash.'

' I suppose that I have my worries too,' she answered bitterly. ' If I had yours, I'd face them honestly. I wouldn't drink champagne every evening and leave my butcher unpaid ; I wouldn't play at cards, and smoke expensive cigars, and talk big, when I knew all the time that I could not meet the bills I'd asked my friends to back for me ; I would not besot and stupefy myself till there wasn't an ounce of manliness left in me.'

' You're a bold woman, to speak to me in this way,' said Vallancy. ' What do you mean ?'

' If you had been a true man you would never have asked Brian Fielding to lend you money !' she exclaimed recklessly.

' Who told you that ? What has he been saying ? It was money that he owed me. Explain yourself.'

' It was money borrowed,' said she, incisively. ' It is not the first time that you have—turned circumstances to your advantage ; but I warned you to spare *him*. I warned you not to goad me too far.'

' Have you suddenly turned prude ?' said Vallancy, roused by her manner. ' I've let you have your own way without asking questions ; but if I really believed that you cared for Fielding, I'd——'



'You'd borrow more money from him,' said she, with bitter sarcasm.

'You go too far,' said Vallancy, lifting his sullen, red eyes from the table-cloth. 'Take care how you irritate me. I know you too well to give you credit for any sentimental weakness. I have allowed you liberty because I knew that you were too selfish to abuse it. I discovered long ago that you only married me because you thought I was rich. How rightly you have been served! If you had taken any pains to please me, I should have been a different husband to you. You have no heart. Even when the child died you did not fret.'

'A woman does not *fret* when her heart is broken,' said Mrs. Vallancy, with the sound of suppressed tears in her voice. 'You make me hard. You teach me to be bad——'

She was leaving the room, but he detained her.

'You have not got me the brandy.'

She went out, and presently returned with a decanter of spirit which she placed before him.

'Don't go yet; I have something else to say to you. Why did you bring Longleat here to-night?'

'I told you that we were travelling together in the coach. Seeing that I was alone he very kindly brought me home. I could do nothing else than ask him in.'

'I detest that man!' exclaimed Mr. Vallancy, savagely. 'I would do him an ill-turn if I could. I owe him more than one. They would have given me the chairmanship of committees if he had not been against me. Well, his day is nearly over.'

'Do you think so? Surely he will carry his Loan Bill.'

'I would lay any money that he does not. The majority will oppose him.'

Mrs. Vallancy shrugged her shoulders, but said nothing.

'Forbes has resigned the police magistracy of Gundaroo,' continued Mr. Vallancy, 'and Middleton has promised it to me, if he comes into power. It's a beastly hole. You won't like going there.'

Gundaroo, a new northern settlement, was at that time the Ultima Thule of civilisation in Leichardt's Land, but the post was important, and there was a considerable salary attached to it.

Mrs. Vallancy looked interested.

'You would take it?'

'Yes; for a short time. There seems no prospect of anything better; and the screw is good and would help me to get rid of this load of debt.'

'Middleton is not in power yet,' said Mrs. Vallancy quietly, and left the room.

'If I could only persuade Longleat to send him there,' she said to herself as she stood looking at her pretty but haggard face in the toilet-glass. 'Have I no heart? Oh, Brian! you know that——'

\* \* \* \* \*

A word about Connie Vallancy.

Her father had been one of the first Government Residents in Leichardt's Land. In the early days of the colony, when emigration was principally confined to the more energetic members of the upper classes of English society; when handsome cadets, full of pluck and adventure, became dare-devil pioneers, eager to distinguish themselves by feats of horsemanship and reckless bravery; when hardships were numerous, and the joys of life scarce, so that a pretty girl was worshipped as a goddess straight from Olympus, Connie Brabourne had been the belle of the district.

Before she was seventeen there was hardly an unmarried man in the colony who had not made her an offer. She was

a terrible coquette, exacted admiration as her tribute, and thought it rather a feather in her cap to be styled a heartless flirt. At last came upon the scene one Brian Fielding, a tall handsome squatter, well born and travelled, with no money to speak of, but plenty of assurance, and with a fascinating manner that women found it difficult to resist.

The two fell desperately in love with each other, and entered into an indefinite sort of engagement, of which the consummation was to be delayed till Brian possessed a station of his own and a house in Sydney. But Connie's father was ambitious; and she too was vain and light of love, and had cherished lurking visions of life in England, of costly clothes, and unlimited admiration from higher quarters. Brian went back to his post of superintendent at an inland station, which had an unpronounceable name, and a mail once in three months; and Connie, to whom flirting had acquired a new stimulus from the fact of its being a forbidden luxury, was left unsupported in the midst of temptations to inconstancy, and finally threw over her lover in favour of Mr. Vallancy, who had aristocratic connections and the reputation of wealth.

There was a story of intercepted letters, of treachery and compulsion; but be that as it may, Connie Brabourne married Mr. Vallancy in the Leichardt's Town church, and went off with him for her honeymoon in England.

She soon found that her husband's riches were mythical, and that her 'grand match' resolved itself into poverty, brag, a taste for expensive luxuries without the means of gratifying it, and doubtful treatment by her new relatives, who flouted her and despised him. She was at first passionately discontented, then fell into a state of listless melancholy, and finally became reckless and defiant.

After a year or two of Bohemian existence in Europe, during which Connie's knowledge of the evil side of

humanity deepened considerably, they returned to Leichardt's Land.

Mr. Vallancy was created a member of the Legislative Council, and made it his aim to get into power ; but, being of an aggressive and cantankerous disposition, contrived to render himself so obnoxious to both political parties that the lucrative Government appointment which he hoped to obtain always dangled temptingly just beyond his reach.

He would condescend to no secondary place, and was loth to deprive himself of the opportunity of making disagreeable allusions in the House. Nothing less than the bait of a police magistracy and a good salary would have satisfied his pride ; and as his influence was small, and his abusive attacks were merely pinpricks, the Government in power always hesitated to buy him at his own price. He kept up a good appearance, though everyone knew that he was steeped in debt, and there were ugly rumours afloat as to the source of the ready money by means of which he staved off disgrace.

An unfortunate marriage may produce in a woman either a state of passive indifference or of emotional craving after some outward form of satisfaction. In Constance Vallancy's case flirtation seemed the only antidote to disappointment. She had no high-souled yearnings to carry her beyond the influence of her passionate excitability. She had begun life with the self-made compact that caresses and admiration were to be her portion, and seeing that they were denied her from a legitimate quarter, could not overcome a sense of ill-usage, while in her heart there was always present a cankerous regret after Brian Fielding, the one man she had truly loved.

Her disposition held no truth-compelling instincts to define the boundary between right and wrong, and contact with an ignoble, self-indulgent nature brought into force

a tendency to deceit. She lied to her husband, justifying falsehood as a weapon against irritable vanity and unreasonable abuse. So she fed her morbid longings upon the stimulant of coquetry, and though she had not suffered actual shipwreck, had more than once steered dangerously near the rocks.

Shortly before the opening of this story Brian Fielding, still fascinating and still poor, reappeared in Leichardt's Town, and renewed his acquaintance with Mrs. Vallancy. He had met her at first with a simulated indifference, which had roused her old passion and piqued her desire for conquest; then he alternately sought and avoided her, and finally had drifted into a sweet but dangerous friendship.

This state of things was broken by Mr. Fielding's sudden departure for Melbourne on a matter of business, likely to result in a permanent appointment in that city.

The fact of his wife's former engagement was a secret to Mr. Vallancy; otherwise it may be doubted whether, base though he was, he would have encouraged the intercourse. Connie had flirted scores of times since their marriage, and he had profited by her love of admiration to borrow money from her adorers; but, to do him justice, he did not doubt her fidelity. He loved her after an unreasonable fashion, at one time caressing, at another upbraiding her, and making her the *confidante* of his petty ambitions and knavish intrigues, till any womanly delicacy that she might have possessed was blunted to cynical indifference.

A weary distaste for life fell upon her after Brian's departure. She panted for freedom, and scorn of her husband became transformed to active hatred. Oh to be rid of the incubus! She was reckless enough to have eloped with Brian had he been willing to take her. But there was no money on either side; she could not ruin his prospects, and there were times, too, when she felt that her influence was

waning, and almost doubted the sincerity of his devotion. And now he was gone, and though he had promised to write to her—had sworn not to forget her, the consolation of his presence had departed from her. Money-troubles were weighing upon her. She was beginning to feel the pressure of want; creditors threatened. She was wretched; felt ill, and was losing her beauty. Her overmastering desire now was to escape from the irritation of her husband's presence, and to secure wealth and freedom from annoyance.

At this juncture she became intimate with the Premier.

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## CHAPTER VI.

'YOU MUST MARRY HONORIA LONGLEAT.'

EARLY the next morning Barrington and Tom Dungie left Kooya. The former was mounted upon one of Lord Dolph's hacks, while Dungie rode the little piebald, which he frequently apostrophised in terms admonitory or admiring. He carried his mail-bags strapped in front of his saddle, and drove before him the pack-horse, which bore Barrington's luggage conveniently disposed in two canvas bags.

For some miles the road led through a semi-cultivated locality, beside portions of uncleared forest, alternating with paddocks where browsed the lean kine that supplied Kooya with milk and butter; past bush homesteads where children clustered round the log door-steps, and shouted at the sight of strangers; by fields of yellow maize and plantations of cotton, in which the flakes of down had just burst their brown pods—till at last the trees almost met over the narrow track, even the public-houses ceased, and the last log-hut

that marked the bounds of human habitation for miles to come had been left behind. Now Barrington felt himself to be in the bush.

This forest solitude, filled with the incessant chirp of locusts, the winging of butterflies, and rustling of the tall dry grass, the monotonous 'Hoo-hoo-hoo-ooo' of the Wonga pigeon, and shrill screech of the jackass, was quite unfamiliar to the Englishman, whose rambles had never before extended beyond the boundaries of Europe.

Tom Dungie rode at a jog-trot which covered the ground quickly, and was not distressing to man or beast. The mail-man was a garrulous little creature, and when he was not talking to his companion addressed a disjointed soliloquy to his horse.

'Now then, stoopid! Hain't yer learnt the track yet? Well, you air an old 'umbug, you air! Can't yer tell a log when yer sees one? Now then, 'urry along: stir your stumps! we've got to be at Kooralbyn to-night.'

'I dare say that you find Kooralbyn a pleasant stopping-place,' said Barrington, already identifying the name with Miss Longleat.

'I don't know that it ain't a little better nor some others,' said Tom, critically. 'I'm took into the kitchen instead o' being sent to the huts; but the glass of grog ain't as reglar as might be. It depends mostly on what I bring—leastways, on what I has for Miss Longleat.'

'How is that?' asked Barrington.

'She comes down to the crossing sometimes when I'm pretty early, and takes the mail-bag herself, and then I stands and watches her open her letters. Lor'! I can tell by the handwriting if they're from her sweethearts. If I happens to have a book or summat of the sort from Mr. Dyson Maddox, it is, "Tom," says she, "I dare say you're tired. Ask Mrs. Ferris for a glass of rum;" or if I hain't

got nothing pertikler, "Tom," she says, "what's the news Dyraaba way?" and so on, gradual like, to Barramunda. My word! they're sharp creatures, women. It ain't everyone as knows how to take 'em. You hain't seen her yet, have you?

'No,' replied Barrington.

'She's awful handsome; but, bless you, I don't take no account on her. Some men are funky upon speaking to her. I've seen gents as didn't know what to say when they looked at her—struck all of a heap, like. But women is like 'osses; them as don't understand 'em is mostly afear'd on 'em.'

The narrowness of the track, which now wound among large boulders of rock, and was strewn with loose stones, compelled them to ride single file. They were descending a high range which commanded a view of the adjacent country. Half-way down, Dungie paused at a little stream, overshadowed by the glossy boughs and crimson flowers of the chestnut, and discoursed while he let his horse drink.

'Yonder is the Koorong Crag,' said he, pointing to a mountain which rose upon their right.

It had all the glory of inaccessibility; its turret-like summit surmounted a deep precipice of bare rock, which could be climbed by no man; its base was clothed with bluish-green foliage, against which the light stems of a group of white gum-trees in the foreground stood out in vivid contrast.

'Our black fellows say that the Debbil-debbil lives up there,' continued Dungie. 'I've heard tell that a long time ago the rocks were covered with creepers, and that one of the first white settlers in the district managed to climb to the top of the mountain by holding on to them. He made a fire upon the highest point, but a wind rose, and the flames



spread and burned all the creepers. His bones lie bleaching up there now.'

They rode on till they reached a gorge dividing two hills. The pack-horse, well accustomed to the narrow track worn along the steep slope, trotted in front, occasionally stopping to nibble the tender shoots of the young ti-trees, while Barrington followed the postman, who would every now and then turn his head with an evident distrust of English horsemanship.

Upon their right sloped the rocky bank of the hill they were skirting. Cairns of grey, volcanic-looking stones, piled by Nature's hand, and overgrown with rank grass and creeping indigo, necessitated frequent deviations; charred logs, the remains of bush-fires, lay across the path; the thick underwood grew dense on each side; flowering parasites hung from the branches overhead, and bines of the crimson *Kennedia* trailed into the streamlet that flowed at the foot of the two hills.

In places the rivulet glided gently over flat stones worn smooth by its course; here and there it tumbled in a miniature cascade over the trunk of a fallen tree, and now lay in pools still and stagnant, with iridescent gleams upon its surface, beneath overhanging fronds of fern. To the left of the riders, the opposite hill rose almost perpendicularly high above their heads. Firs clung to the rocky soil, and native jessamine and waxen *hoya* shed their fragrance in the air. The sharp st-wt of the whip-bird and the footfalls of the horses echoed through the gorge with startling distinctness. The solitude was intense; neither aboriginal nor beast was to be seen prowling about this mountain fastness; only every now and then a rustling of dry leaves would attract attention, and the sharp head of a wallabi might be observed protruding from behind some jagged rock, and disappearing in an instant.

At length they emerged from the ravine, and mounted to the highest point of the range which bounded the Koorong district. Below them, the country stretched in smooth plains and undulating ridges; and beyond lay a succession of mountains like distant rolling waves, with here and there a more prominent peak catching the sun's reflection upon its stony sides, and standing out in vivid contrast to the shadowy purple of the lower and further hills.

'Stop a moment,' said Barrington, pausing and involuntarily raising his hat.

Beauty of nature or of art was a powerful agent in stirring his senses to a pitch of excitement hardly warranted by his self-contained exterior. As a boy he had sometimes lain down and wept at the sudden sight of a fine landscape; and his pulses had tingled with keen emotion while he stood before a beautiful statue or a lovely pictured face. There is a poetic, quasi-intellectual passion which in some natures is hardly less potent than that aroused by wine or women.

Dungie checked his horse, and regarded his companion with reflective curiosity.

'Pretty, ain't it?' said he, with something of the pride of proprietorship. 'There ain't any district in Leichardt's Land as beats the Koorong for scenery—mountains and such like. To be sure, the grass is not to be remarked for over-fattening,' he added, with a sigh; 'but where there's big bones, there ain't often sweet flesh. Old Anthony Ferris Kooralbyn way, he do go almost cracked over them rocks. I've heard him screeching out his bits of poetry, till I've thought him ripe for Woogaroo mad-house. Longleat is pretty smart about the men he employs, but what made him take old Ferris for his storekeeper beats the folks up here hollow . . . Yon is the dividing range between this colony and New South Wales. Kooralbyn lays there,' indicating an extensive timbered tract that stretched eastward beneath the

mountains. 'We are close upon Dyraaba now, and that's my place agen the creek. It's a bit dull sometimes, but the mail keeps me running. I've only seen three females on my selection since I took it up four years last November. One was the gell from Barramunda, as rode down with the stockman one Sunday arternoon. T'other was my lady. She wur a-looking for the strawberry cow as got bogged in the creek, and t'other——'

Here Dungie paused, and silently ruminated for several minutes.

'And who was the third?' asked Barrington.

'T'wur Miss MacCutchan,' replied Dungie, laconically. 'Now then, git along, you old stoopid! You've seen this 'ere view often enough before.'

Presently the mailman halted at a round waterhole fringed with blady grass, and overshadowed by the gnarled branches of a giant eucalyptus globulus. Here Dungie dismounted, stooped down, and pushed aside the lily-leaves which floated on the surface of the pool, washed his face and hands, and deliberately assumed a rusty black alpaca coat. His appearance was so comical and his gravity so portentous, that Barrington laughingly asked him the reason of these preparations.

'I knows my drawbacks,' said Dungie. 'I ain't much to look at; but respect goes a long way. Butter doan't come no quicker for fast churning.'

With this pregnant remark Dungie's garrulity suddenly abated, and he scarcely uttered a word till they had reached a log-hut built in a cleared bit of scrub, and surrounded by a rude stockade, within which grew some lank peach-trees and straggling cabbage-plants. Just outside the hut a young woman stood busily engaged over her wash-tub. She was extremely tall and of rich colouring, with high cheek-bones and abundant dark hair.

Miss MacCutchan—for it was she—looked up as the

mailman approached, wiped the soapsuds from her hands and arms, and nodded.

'Have ye got anything for me to-day, Mr. Dungie?' said she.

Dungie, leaving Barrington outside the railings, dismounted from his horse, and presented her with a well-thumbed envelope.

'My sentiments is in there,' said he, with whining gravity; 'there's a year's mail-contract to run, and then I'm a-goin' to settle down on the selection.'

Miss MacCutchan took the letter, reddened, and thrust it into the pocket of her gown.

'Get along with you and your stupid valentines!' she cried. 'You should buy a speaking-parrot to make your soft speeches for you. Dress him up in your Sunday coat, and no one 'ud know the difference. I ain't the sort of woman to be running second to a mail-contract. You'd best be getting on your way, or you'll be late at Kooralbyn to-night.' And she obstinately resumed the scrubbing of a pair of moleskins.

Dungie meekly retreated, remounted his pony, and rode off by Barrington's side. For some time he maintained silence, then remarked, with a deep sigh:

'She's a fine young woman to look at. I've had my eye upon her for four year. I'm pretty sure what she's made of; but I ain't a-goin' to give up my mail-contract; no, not for her. That's the odds atween us.'

When they had ridden out of sight of the hut Dungie came to another standstill, took off his rusty coat, re-strapped it in his valise, and pursued his way more cheerfully. The influence of Miss MacCutchan's presence removed, loquacity returned to him, and he expatiated freely upon the beauties of the scenery and the population of the Koorong district, till the paddock-fence of Dyraaba came in sight.

A narrow creek wound round the rise upon which the

house was built, and, to Barrington's surprise, was crossed by such a rustic bridge as might have spanned the ornamental water of a gentleman's park in England. Near the bridge, sloping down to the water, there was an artificial rockery, the prim elegance of which contrasted strangely with the wildness of forest and desolation of mountains that characterised the scene.

Instead of riding over the bridge, the postman made a round to the crossing, where the water reached to his stirrups.

'He do set store on them bits of planks and tree-stumps, does Lord Dolph,' said Dungie, contemptuously. 'The next flood in the Koorong 'ull carry them all away. For my part, I like what's in natur' better nor what's out of it; and the little piebald is far too 'cute to trust her legs on that English fal-deral.'

Dyraaba lay at the foot of a rugged hill which overshadowed the house, and was the joy of Lord Dolph's heart, and the despair of that of his stockrider. The dwelling-house, a four-roomed hut, was built of slabs and roofed with bark. Two sides were shaded by a verandah supported by rough saplings, round which twined native clematis and scrub-creepers. The floor of the verandah was of mud; a fernery was in course of construction against the walls, and two fine plants of the staghorn variety flourished on each side of the doorway; a crimson double geranium bloomed by a verandah-post, and verbenas flowered at the sills of the unglazed windows. Behind the house a dense smoke obscured the out-buildings.

'That's my lady makin' a spree amongst the rubbish,' remarked Dungie; and presently they came in sight of Lady Dolph herself, who, with her cotton gown tucked up over her linsey petticoat, was busy picking up sticks which she threw upon the pile.

She was a comely little body, with a round rosy face,

bright grey eyes, light hair and eyebrows, and a trim waist. As soon as Barrington appeared on the scene she exploded in a fit of giggling, threw down her sticks, and ran into the hut, where she presently emerged with a fair-haired, boyish-looking man, who was smoking a short pipe, and wore his shirt-sleeves tucked up over a pair of blue-veined arms, that Barrington had last seen uncovered on the river below Eton. They had roughened considerably since then, and the good-looking, aristocratic face was sunburnt and hairy; nevertheless, there was in the youth's whole appearance an unmistakable air of refinement, quite out of keeping with his surroundings.

Adolphus Bassett, the seventh son of an impoverished peer, having shown small aptitude for the clerical profession, for which he had been intended, had upon his father's death emigrated to Australia, where he had employed his small patrimony in the purchase and stocking of Dyraaba, and had married Maggie, the daughter of one Lamb, a squatter on the Koorong. She made him an excellent wife, managed the few score of cattle which Dyraaba maintained, rode as colonial women do ride, displayed considerable culinary skill, and was tenacious of her dignity, claiming her title even when she was engaged in salting beef and such other unrefined occupations.

Lord Dolph shook hands heartily with Barrington, who had by this time dismounted.

'Hallo! so you have turned up. I am delighted to see you; we didn't half expect you to-day. Most fellows get funk'd over the short cut. But Dungie is a capital pioneer. You can't go wrong if you follow the little piebald. She's a rare one, isn't she, Tom? I say, this don't put you much in mind of Headington, eh?'

Barrington smiled; Lord Dolph laughed, and Maggie giggled.

'Let me introduce you to my wife,' said Dolph. 'We were having a go at the rubbish-heap. Come, if this doesn't bang Europe, as Maggie would say, I'm blest. It's the Tyrol with perpetual vegetation. Did you notice my bridge? I modelled it after the one at Headington. You must come out presently and see the yards. We are setting up pigs. I shall make no end of money out of my porkers; the selectors buy 'em. We're thorough bush people here. I go in for roughing it like one o'clock. It's not half bad fun; and there's excellent duck-shooting down the creek. Come inside and we'll open the post-bag. I believe there's an English mail due.'

Lady Dolph, with one shoulder awkwardly raised above the other, led the way into the sitting-room, which was pretty enough, though the walls were only canvased, and daylight might be seen between any two of the outer slabs, which stood apart as though they had not been introduced to one another. There was a curious application of English æstheticism to the rude arrangements and home-made furniture of the Australian bush. The wide fireplace was surmounted by an artistic erection of polished cedar, crimson paper, and blue china plates. Roughly-carved brackets supported pots of Doulton and Vallauris ware. Engravings after Angelica Kauffmann and Bartolozzi, that might have been filched from the Headington corridors, and photographs of familiar English and foreign scenes, lined the walls. The canvas chairs were adorned with crewel-work done by Lord Dolph's sisters. An opossum rug lay before the hearth. Beneath the window stood a pine writing-table, furnished with equipments of oxidised silver. A grand piano filled up one side of the room, and was littered with music. Lord Dolph, with boyish pride in a new toy, ran his fingers over the keys, and trolled forth in a fine tenor one of Sullivan's songs.

'Is it not a beauty?' he cried. 'There's not another instrument like it in Leichardt's Land. Headington sent it to me for a wedding present. We had a rare piece of work getting it across the creeks. Maggie said she'd rather have had the money to spend on bulls; but she likes it better now that I've taught her to sing duets with me. She has as nice a voice as there is in the district, except old Ferris's daughter's—poor little girl!'

'Why do you pity her?' asked Barrington.

Lord Dolph touched his forehead significantly, and went on playing.

'It's in the family,' he added. 'The old man is as mad as a hatter, a snarling, discontented creature. Longleat's storekeeper; it's a mystery to me how he got the situation. *There's* a wife for a settler!' he whispered enthusiastically, directing Barrington's glance towards Maggie, who was sorting out the letters that had just arrived. 'Hand them over, old girl. I wish you'd take out this note I have written to Miss Longleat, and give it to Dungie.'

Maggie departed. Lord Dolph rose from the piano, stretched himself, and looked with a sort of sheepish inquiry at his guest.

'I dare say you are thinking that she wouldn't suit marble halls, dukes, and duchesses, and that sort of thing,' he said; 'but bless you! she'd go down splendidly if I were to take her home.'

'She is unaffectedly charming!' said Barrington, with more heartiness than he felt. 'I congratulate you.'

'Really now, I'm glad you like her, though I detest the notion that a man's wife, like his horse, must be subject to the criticism of his friends. I suppose that you saw my people before you left England?'

'Lord Headington went down with me to Southampton—he was very kind—but I saw none of the others.'



'He is a rare old sort is Headington,' said Lord Dolph in a constrained tone. 'Didn't Sir Lionel see you off?'

'No; Lionel and I never pulled over-well together. He is a prig, and my mother leads him by the nose. His wife is a fool. I think she would have taken my part if she dared. I disliked her, and she was sorry for me in my trouble. My mother, whom I worshipped, was hard as a stone.'

'I say,' said Lord Dolph, 'I heard about your mess. I'm awfully sorry for it. It's no use beating about the bush. My mother keeps me pretty well up in what is going on.'

'I suppose,' said Barrington, looking at Lord Dolph without blenching, 'that she told you how I had left the Guards.'

'I heard there had been a row. She wrote me some particulars. Women are never very clear in matters of detail.'

'Your mother and mine are old friends. They have thoroughly discussed my iniquities. You have had your information direct from head-quarters, and I have no doubt that it is correct,' said Barrington, bitterly. 'Look here, Dolph; the hardest cut I've ever had was my mother's conduct in that affair. You know what she is—how cold, and yet how fascinating. The head of the family is her god; if I had been the eldest son I should have been immaculate. I have always felt that she might have done with me what she chose. I hated the idea of coming out here: when she urged it—when she seemed anxious to get rid of me—I had no heart to resist. Now that I am here I don't know what I shall do. Do you think that I am the stuff to make a settler?'

'Emphatically no,' said Lord Dolph. 'You would have to take up new country, drive cattle, explore, and that sort of thing. You wouldn't stand it.'

‘Then there is a poor prospect before me. I may trust you ; your family has always been staunch to me. My brother allows me one hundred and fifty pounds a year, otherwise I have nothing. What can I do?’

‘Why!’ cried Lord Dolph, with his frank, hearty laugh, ‘Maggie and I settled that when we heard that you were coming. You must marry Honoria Longleat, and become the owner of the great Tarrangella tin-mine.’

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## CHAPTER VII.

### AN AUSTRALIAN EXPLORER.

SOME few days after the arrival of Barrington at Dyraaba, Mr. Dyson Maddox and his superintendent, Cornelius Cathcart, were riding over the ranges from Barramunda in the direction of Kooralbyn. The two stations, with Dyraaba forming the point of a triangle between, lay about fifteen miles apart, a convenient distance to be pleaded as an excuse for remaining the night when alluring attractions offered themselves, and not too far to be retraced late in the day when circumstances rendered return desirable.

Of the two men, the superintendent, as requiring the shortest notice, may be described first. He was small and spare, with a loosely-built frame, upon which his clothes hung as upon a peg ; a yellow face ornamented by a tiny flaxen imperial, and narrow blue eyes. He was always shabbily dressed. At all times a restless imp seemed to possess his frame. When he walked, his body jerked convulsively ; when he rode, his limbs twitched as though he were a victim to incipient St. Vitus’s dance. His tone was caustic, and he affected cynicism. He had been Maddox’s

companion for several years, first in certain exploring expeditions on the northern coast which the latter had conducted, and afterwards as manager of Barramunda.

Maddox had upon one occasion saved Cathcart's life in a flooded creek, and this circumstance was sufficient warrant for the strong, undemonstrative attachment that existed between two dissimilar natures. Of late, however, a slight constraint had arisen in their intercourse. It was suspected by both, though not admitted by either, that this was due to Miss Longleat's influence.

Yet in what way was difficult to define. There could be no question of rivalry between the two men. Had there been, Cathcart would certainly have withdrawn in favour of his friend, while he would as certainly have cloaked his generosity under an appearance of snarling contempt. As it was, circumstances forbade him to think of matrimony. To aspire to the heiress of the Tarrangella Mine would have been ridiculous presumption. Cathcart would not acknowledge to himself that Honoria attracted him; but that she constantly filled his mind was evident, and that there was a latent bitterness in his thoughts of her was equally certain.

Dyson Maddox was broad-shouldered and thick-set, with muscles like iron, and a skin mellowed by exposure to the colour of untanned leather. He had finely-hewn features, a determined mouth, and brown, level eyes. There was brusque daring in his glance, and much frank nobility in the sweep of his brow. He had a trick of frowning when pre-occupied, which gave a morose expression to his face; but when the frown dispersed there was sweetness in his look. His hair curled in heavy locks, and his moustache and whiskers were carelessly trimmed, as though he were not accustomed to expend thought upon his toilette.

A typical Australian of the second generation, unconventional, courageous, and energetic; lacking somewhat the

graces of society, but rich in an air of native distinction, and in the chivalry which arises from intuitive good breeding. He was far removed from the thin-skinned, metaphysical breed, and had none of that æsthetic sentimentalism which is a development of Old-World civilisation. His passions were strong, but balanced by logical power and by the discipline of a hard life. He had a rare faculty for repressing emotion; was deliberate in action, and slow to receive new impressions. Though fairly cultivated, he had not followed intellectual pursuits more closely than the exigencies of a purely Australian career had demanded.

The master and the manager had been discoursing for some time upon bovine matters, when Maddox remarked, apropos of an arrangement for selling fat cattle during the winter: 'It is possible that I may not be much at Barramunda after the opening of Parliament. I am thinking of taking a more active part in politics this session.'

'So I imagined. Of course you have been offered the post of Minister for Lands. It seems the pet ambition nowadays to make one's self into a target for scurrilous attacks.'

'You take an unfortunate view of the question,' replied Dyson. 'Why should political distinction be an unworthy aim here? There must be interested motives underlying all party strife; they come nearer the surface in a small community. I have always wished to be in the Cabinet, but there are reasons which make me hesitate to accept the position. I must, however, let the Premier know my decision this evening.'

'But beforehand you must make yourself certain of your ground with Miss Longleat. I understand. This is the reason of your detour by Kooralbyn. I hope she will be there, and that you may catch her in a listening mood. That is the worst of having to do with capricious persons; there is no calculating their humours. Well, if you are

successful in your suit, be good enough to apprise me as early as possible of the fact, so that I may clear out of Barramunda without delay.'

'You have always said that you would leave Barramunda when I married. Why should you do so? No one should interfere with you in the Bachelors' Quarters.'

'Not even the Bachelors' Quarters would be sacred to Mrs. Maddox,' answered Cathcart, shortly. 'Thank you, but there is not room at Barramunda for Miss Longleat and for me. I shall take up country out west, or go to Fiji, which seems the refuge for unfortunates just now.'

'I have sometimes fancied,' said Dyson in a hesitating manner, though he spoke with deliberate emphasis, 'that you were attracted by Miss Longleat. The thought has troubled me, although I have no actual grounds for entertaining it. I only guess at your feelings. You know my wishes. Come, hadn't we better have the matter out?'

'Make your mind easy,' said Cathcart. 'I am too good a servant to poach on my master's preserves. I may be a fool, but I am not such a drivelling idiot as to suppose that Miss Longleat would think of me as a husband. An admirer is another thing; a chimney-sweep may be at liberty to worship a goddess. I dare say that she is piqued because I have not thrown myself at her feet; but I have some self-respect. That girl puzzles me. I cannot make up my mind whether I dislike or pity her most.'

'Tell me your reasons for disliking her,' said Maddox.

'She is always posing for effect. There is nothing genuine about her except her greediness for sensation. She is an actress who believes in her parts. She is cold-blooded and passionate together. She is intolerably selfish; she has everything to make her happy, and she is morbidly discontented. She despises her father who adores her. She is not womanly. Then her frankness is extraordinary. She

is essentially a New-World product. No European young woman could combine so much boldness with an innocence which one is obliged to take for granted. Excuse me if I offend your susceptibilities ; you asked my opinion.'

'Go on,' said Maddox. 'Now, why do you pity her?'

'She is absolutely solitary ; she has neither women friends nor relations. As long as she cultivates fastidiousness, there can be no sympathy between her and her father. She has been badly brought up. What result could one expect from a Sydney boarding-school? And I think that there is a certain nobility in her nature. She will be either good or bad. She is discontented with herself. If she were wise she would marry you, but I do not think she will—just yet. Our roads separate here. I am going to meet Brown at Jaff's Peak Camp.'

'You'll not come on to Kooralbyn, then?'

'No ; there are the weaners to be looked after, and the long-tailed strawberry cow to be brought in. And I am not unselfish enough to play bodkin.'

Cathcart turned his horse, and with a curt good-bye galloped away through the trees, till he had disappeared over the brow of the hill. Maddox rode on through the silent forest, descending the range and skirting the creek, where the tall cedars, laden with the golden berries of autumn, cast their shadows over the tracks.

Dyson Maddox's grandfather had come out to Australia holding a Crown appointment in New South Wales. The office under a responsible Government had descended to the son, who, in his turn, had died suddenly before Dyson had attained his majority. Thus it will be seen that the lad was a true native of the soil. He inherited from his father an easy competence, and having neither brothers, sisters, nor near relations, had no claims upon his purse. But he was not content to plod on in conventional fashion ; he

must needs carve his fortune in his own manner. It was his ambition to become one of the pioneers of Australian civilisation. He had made several more or less successful attempts to penetrate into the interior, and a few years before the present date had equipped and commanded an exploring expedition, which, with a dauntless energy seldom equalled in the annals of Australia, had fought its way through the heart of Leichardt's Land to a point on the extreme northern coast, hitherto only accessible by sea.

At the risk of starvation, and of murder by the hostile tribes, whose territories had never before been invaded by white men, the little band, with Dyson Maddox at its head, pushed on towards the northern peninsula. Half-way the horses perished from eating poisonous berries in a scrub; provisions failed, and sickness thinned the number. Nevertheless, the brave men pursued their way on foot, through forest and desert, subject to night attacks and to daily peril of native ambuscades, till they reached the remote seaboard township of Gundaroo, a port commanding the northern waters, and a touching-place for mail-steamers of sufficient importance to render the establishment of land communication with the southern districts a matter of concern to the Leichardt's Land Government.

In the course of this expedition Maddox's left arm had been disabled by the thrust of a black's spear, hurled during a midnight surprise of his camp. He was almost a cripple when he reached Gundaroo. A few months later he knew that he could no longer draw his trigger with certainty of effect, or rely upon his physical strength to aid him in combating the dangers and difficulties which beset the path of an explorer.

Thirst after unknown country had been the ruling motive of his life. The miner who digs in the expectation of striking a priceless nugget knows no keener excitement than

that which Dyson experienced at the first glimpse of some broad river or fertile rolling plain, never before gazed upon by any but barbarian eyes, but which, by his discovery, might in future ages become the home of thousands of his race.

The abstract side of existence had few claims upon him, yet he was not without enthusiasm of an inspiring, practical kind, and was strongly imbued with the notion that he who places fresh territory at the service of his country has a no less exalted mission than the scientific investigator, the mechanical discoverer, or the pathological inquirer.

Now this wound, inflicted by the ignominious weapon of an aboriginal, had changed the whole current of his existence. He could no longer lead the life of perilous adventure which had held for him so great a charm. His health had been injured by exposure and privation, and those anxious six months, during which death had stared him in the face, had visibly whitened his hair and perceptibly reduced his vigour.

He had left Leichardt's Town full of animal health and reckless bravery; he reached Gundaroo broken-down, subdued, and prematurely aged, his ambition checked in the very hour of fulfilment. There was nothing for him but to return south, and to embrace a tranquil, bucolic career, seasoned by the mild excitement of politics.

But when, after his purchase of Barramunda, he paid his first visit to Kooralbyn, and saw again Honoria Longleat, whom he had known as a child, now fresh from school, and radiant in the first consciousness of power and the bloom of early womanhood, he almost ceased to regret the life he had quitted. A vague, delicious dream, which had sweetened his wanderings, took defined shape, and imparted a new zest to existence. Frank, daring, original, with the touch of passionate sensibility that he himself lacked, he felt that she was the one woman who could make his happiness.



But he was cautious and deliberate, and did not snatch the prize when it was, perhaps, within his reach. Honoria had her ambitious dreams of a life of colour and excitement. Sometimes he seemed to her cold and commonplace, sometimes unrefined. She began to mix in the world and to taste the sweets of coquetry. She accustomed herself to associate elegance of manners with an European education. As a slave or an adoring mentor, Dyson pleased her well enough, but she was almost convinced that he would not be a husband to her liking. Yet she was not happy when he absented himself from her society. She paid deference to his opinion: by turns she piqued and enthralled him, offended if he refused to dance attendance in her train, despising him for patient endurance of her whims. So matters stood, but Honoria was not aware that he had given her a certain length of tether, and had determined to suffer these alternations of hope and despair no longer.

After an hour's riding Maddox crossed the river for the last time, and entered an extensive plain, commonly called 'the racecourse,' that lay between the creek and the hill upon which Kooralbyn was built. Now he passed through the slip-rails and was admitted into the home-paddock. Behind him rose the mountains, sloping in a series of wooded ranges to the plain. Herds of cattle and horses browsed upon the rich pasture, which was dotted with clumps of trees and bordered by a fringe of green that marked the course of the river.

The head-station of Kooralbyn consisted of a cluster of cottages built upon the hump of a low hill that overlooked the racecourse. Three of these buildings were placed in a garden enclosed by a high fence, of which one portion was overgrown with passion-fruit, while the remainder supported a hedge of cactus. Round each was a wide verandah, partly trellised with vines, and festooned by bougainvillea,

snowy stephanotis, and the orange, bell-shaped flowers of the begonia. The two smaller cottages, in one of which dwelt Mr. Ferris and his family, while the other was the kitchen of the establishment, were connected by covered passages with the larger house occupied by Mr. Longleat and his two daughters. Outside the enclosure stood the Bachelors' Quarters, set apart for the accommodation of passing strangers, and for the use of gentlemen stockmen, and *new chums*, of which, upon a large Australian station, there are often several.

The garden sloped in vine-covered walks towards the plain. At its foot lay a small silvery lagoon, with lilies, white and delicate mauve, floating upon its surface. Beyond, in the distance, rose the amphitheatre of hills, some purple and shadowy, some grey and barren, prominent among them the Koorong Crag, to which Barrington's attention had been directed during his ride to Dyraaba.

The stockyards and outhouses were situated at some little distance from the cluster of cottages.

An avenue of bunyas, still in their youth, led from the stables to the back-entrance to the garden. Maddox rode straight hither, dismounted, and called :

'Hi, Cobra Ball !'

A black-boy, grinning from ear to ear, woolly-haired and red-lipped, approached at the summons, and took Maddox's horse.

'Ba'al Massa want em yarraman again to-day ?'\* he asked, in the curious vernacular common to half-civilised natives.

'Yes,' replied Dyson ; 'this fellow go along a Kooya to-night. Keep him in the yard.'

'Youi,'† said Cobra Ball. 'Missee Honoria along a

\* Being interpreted, runs thus : 'Does the master want the horse again to-day ?'

† 'Yes. Miss Honoria is at the house. Mr. Longleat is not at Kooralbyn.'

humpey. Missa Longleat ba'al at Kooralbyn ; that fellow gone along a Leichardt's Town. You got em grog?' he added, with an insinuating gesture, as in taking off the saddle a flask dropped from Maddox's pouch to the ground.

'Look and see,' said the squatter, drily.

Cobra Ball eagerly snatched the flask, uncorked it, poured a drop of its contents upon his hand, which he smelled excitedly, then uttered an exclamation of disgust.

'Ba'al budgery white man gammon poor fellow like it that,'\* he said piteously, and restored the flask to its former receptacle.

Maddox walked down between the bunya-trees, and, opening a wicket-gate which led into the garden, quietly entered the enclosure. An air of inaction hung over the place. The two long verandahs facing each other were tenantless, save for the bright lizards that darted every now and then across the rough boards ; and a large hound, lying under the shade of an orange-tree, lifted his head and yapped peevishly, but was too lazy to bark or stir. As Maddox let the gate swing back upon its well-oiled hinges, a child of six darted out from beneath the passion-fruit vines which covered the fence, and from which the purple eggs temptingly hung. Her face and hands were stained with yellow juice, which she vainly tried to wipe off upon her pinafore. She was a queer elf-like little creature, with a yellow, old-fashioned face, large black eyes, and dark-brown hair, that hung in a drake's-tail wave upon her skinny shoulders.

'Oh, Mr. Maddox, Mr. Maddox !' she cried in her thin voice ; 'it *is* hot ! I've been looking for a big green frog to put down my back and keep me cool. Do you think that you could find me one ?'

\* 'It is not kind of the white man to deceive a poor black fellow in this way.'

'You little story-teller, Janie,' said Maddox, good-humouredly. 'Is anyone at home?'

'Mr. Maddox, we had the very last melon to-day, and Mrs. Ferris is making a tart for dinner; and Euphrosyne has got kittens,' affirmed Janie. 'She'll have to be called Old Phrosyne now,' continued the child with reflective wisdom, 'for the kittens is the new Phrosynes; and father has gone down to fight Mr. Middleton.'

'Is your sister indoors?' inquired Dyson.

'Little mother is in the front-parlour, or out on the verandah,' said Janie. 'Mr. Dyson,' she ended vehemently, 'I *wasn't* eating passion-fruit.'

'Janie, Janie,' called a woman's voice from the house.

'I'm coming, Aunt Pen,' cried Janie, and darted off in the opposite direction.

A middle-aged lady, in a spotless apron and a cap adorned with many ribbons, was rolling out pastry at the open window of the kitchen. She was a comely body with flaxen hair and round blue eyes, bright-complexioned and well-favoured, with an air of wishing well to all the world, and a little flutter irresistibly suggestive of a thickly-feathered Brahma hen, characterising her movements.

'Dear heart!' exclaimed she; 'why it is Mr. Maddox!' She gave him a rapid nod and continued the manipulation of her pastry. 'You'll stop for luncheon. It'll be a scrappy sort of meal; but whatever it is, I can't give ye any better, for they are waiting for that old man of mine to come back and see about killing a fresh bullock. You haven't seen anything of him, I suppose.'

'No, Mrs. Ferris. I have come from Barramunda.'

'I hope he hasn't got laid up at Braysher's with the nasty grog they make him drink. Brandy and art together, are just the ruin of him.'

While Mrs. Ferris turned for a moment to admonish the

maid-servant who was assisting her, Dyson made his way past the window, stepped on to the back verandah of the big house, as it was called, and tapped at the open door.

His knock remained unanswered. Ceremony is scant in the Australian bush. Dyson entered the sitting-room, which was evidently deserted, and paused, looking about for traces of its owner. The apartment was large and cool-looking, ceiled and lined with cedar, the darkness of which was relieved by white muslin curtains, and the many prints and photographs which covered the walls. The floor was matted ; an open piano stood in one of the corners, book-cases filled the recesses. Flowers bloomed everywhere ; bowls of roses scented the air, and the wide fireplace was hidden by ferns. Newspapers and magazines littered the small tables. The room occupied the width of the building, and upon the opposite side the open French windows, festooned by creepers, framed lovely views of the plain and mountains.

‘ Who is there ? Come in,’ said a voice from without.

Maddox crossed the room, and was enchanted for a moment by the charming picture which presented itself.

A very beautiful young woman reclined in a hammock, slung at the coolest and shadiest end of the verandah. Behind her was a trellis of vines, upon which a few late bunches still hung ; a trailing withe of orange begonia touched her shoulder. Her head was bent, and the light shining through the leaves upon her hair imparted to it a warm chestnut tint. She was dressed in light-blue muslin befitting the summer’s day, and beneath its transparent folds the round lines and delicate indentations of her shoulders and bust might be traced. One hand supported her cheek ; the sleeve had fallen back from her arm, and its shapely curves were half exposed. She was rather a Venus than a Diana. There was a suspicion of voluptuousness in her

attitude, as, with her feet lightly touching the ground, she swayed herself softly to and fro in her hammock. A book was in her lap, on the ground beside her a basket of guavas. It was the incarnation of summer luxuriance and dreamy idleness.

She looked up with a pair of brown eyes at once *farouche* and enticing. He saw a clear-tinted oval, with a low forehead; a nose that would have been Grecian but for the faintest turn at its point, which gave piquancy to a face that might otherwise have appeared too severely classical; flexible lips, moist and full, slightly disdainful when in repose, purely bewitching when they smiled; and an expression half-expectant, half-weary.

A soft evanescent flush overspread her face as she greeted her visitor with a little nod and a smile that must have assured him that he was welcome.

‘I half thought that we should see you to-day. I hope that you are going to stay the night. I have been bored to death this week. I don’t find my own company particularly agreeable at any time, and it becomes quite unsupportable when it is the only alternative to the Ferris’s society.’

‘I thought that Mrs. Ferris looked especially radiant just now.’

‘She is always smiling, good soul! I dislike people who take an invariably cheerful view of life—they exasperate me. Have you been to Leichardt’s Town lately?’

‘I am on my way there now; I have only put up my horse for an hour or two, and must start again directly after luncheon.’

‘Oh, tell Cobra Ball to turn your horse out, unless there is any special attraction. In that case I should be annoyed, for I am very jealous. I don’t often stoop to entreaty, but you see that I am at my lowest ebb. Do stay.’

‘I wish I could; but the fact is that I have an important

engagement with your father this evening, and should not have come here, but that I wished particularly to see you. You have heard of poor Carey's sudden death ?

'Yes ; papa hurried to town at once ; but how can one keep posted in political news with a mail only once a week ? Who will be the new Minister ?'

'Mr. Longleat has offered me the appointment.'

'I guessed that you were the coming man, though he was terribly close on the subject. Surely you don't hesitate. Of course you will accept.'


She looked at him with bright penetrating eyes, though she hardly abated the slow movement of the hammock in which she had again seated herself.

He leaned against the verandah-post and deliberately regarded her.

'I think so,' he replied slowly. 'On the whole, I feel it best that I should. Yet there are considerations that make me uncertain what to do. What would *you* advise ?'

'Oh, how can you ask ! Acceptance of course. I have imagined myself into a state of frantic excitement over the Railway question. I can imagine myself into most moods. There is no imagination, however, in my wish to see my friends distinguished and occupying as high places as it is possible for them to reach. I suppose there is a certain glory in being a cabinet minister—even in Leichardt's Land . . . But tell me your views, and the reason of your hesitation.'

'I am not a man of wide political influence, and, on considering the matter, have thought that it might be more advantageous for our party if a less decided member of the squatting faction were chosen. It is a reproach against Longleat's Ministry that it is composed almost entirely of squatters. Every means ought to be taken to strengthen it—it is weaker than you suppose.'



‘You are a prophet of evil,’ said Honoria. ‘Tell me how I can serve the cause. I will do anything short of marrying Mr. Middleton that is likely to promote our interests. But I think that you underrate your popularity. You are a great explorer. You have made a name. Surely you may consider yourself a pillar of the State.’

Dyson smiled sadly.

‘I don’t like you to speak in that way,’ he said gravely. ‘It makes me fancy that you are laughing at me. I have done nothing out of the common. I believe that I could have made discoveries if my health had not failed me; and you touch upon a sore point when you allude to that Gundaroo expedition. The passion for exploring is still strong upon me. I sometimes think that I could face death to gratify it. But it is silly work experimentalising upon one’s self. I want now to become a political great-gun—it seems a petty ambition—I know that you despise it—’

‘How do you know that?’ interrupted Honoria. ‘You would interest me immensely if you would set yourself to analyse my character, and tell me how far I am real and how far sham.’

‘I wish that I knew,’ said Dyson, earnestly. ‘You are a very difficult person to understand.’

‘Not to anyone who interested me sufficiently to make me forget myself,’ said Honoria, with a soft deliberateness which gave peculiar force to her words.

Dyson was about to speak, and glanced uneasily around, but Janie’s voice was heard outside in rapid protesting colloquy with Mrs. Ferris.

Honoria went to the back verandah and said an admonitory word to the child. When she returned, Dyson was perfectly cool.

‘I don’t think anything of your objection,’ she said, ‘if it is so purely disinterested as that. I begin to look upon



Mr. Carey's death as quite providential. Though you accuse me of a mock enthusiasm, I care sufficiently for the party to feel the importance of its being thoroughly cemented. Better a squatter than a half-hearted townsman. I am not above owning to personal motives for my advice. I have a selfish reason for wishing you to become Minister for Lands. You will be obliged to spend the winter in Leichardt's Town. I want you to belong to my world, to live my life. I missed you terribly in Sydney last year.'

'Are you really in earnest?' exclaimed Dyson. 'I know that you are fond of pleasure—that you like new friends. I sometimes think that admiration is the breath of your life. You must have had your fill in Sydney. I could not hope that you had given me a thought.'

'Yes; I dare say that I thought of you every day. I am certain that I did so whenever I was particularly naughty. You have a way of showing your disapproval which amuses me. Your displeasure adds zest to wrong-doing.'

'And gratifies your sense of power,' said Dyson with bitterness. 'I am sure that is what you mean.'

'Perhaps,' said Honoria, provokingly; then added: 'And perhaps I cared, too, a little whether you were satisfied or angry with me.'

'Are you tired of Kooralbyn yet?' asked Maddox, abruptly.

'I liked it at first, but now the monotony stifles me. I ring the changes upon the various employments available—lounging in the verandah and garden, eating fruit, riding, walking, sleeping, and reading novels, till I am bored with all. The novels only make the dulness more unendurable, for they describe life to me as I have no chance of knowing it.'

'You mean the life beyond Australia?'

'Yes. This is only a state of half existence. Books are

so unsatisfying. I read them greedily at first ; then throw them aside in disgust. They never take one below the surface. There must be some deep experience, even here. Human beings are the same all the world over ; only their surroundings influence them. What we know well seems commonplace. I would gladly exchange those mountains yonder for a tame English meadow. At least I should be the richer for a new sensation. It's the same with the people I meet ; their conversation, their ideas, are humdrum. I am weary of everything I see and hear. . . .'

'Little mother,' interrupted Janie, running on to the verandah and standing on tiptoe, her hands clasped in excitement, 'Cobra Ball says that it is so cool and nice under the big apple-tree on the ridge ; and I want some moss to stuff my doll's bed. Oh, do come ! and Mr. Dyson can pull me some off the branches. Mr. Dyson, you've got nothing to do ; come and help me.'

'Janie,' said Honoria, severely, 'you have been disobeying me. I forbade you to play with Cobra Ball.'

'Whop me !' cried Janie, striking a dramatic attitude. 'I didn't mean to be naughty, and make your heart ache, little mother. Whop me, and drive the devil out of me, and then we'll gather moss.'

Honoria took the child in her arms, and gazed fondly at the little dark face on a level with her own handsome head. The womanly softness of her nature seemed to have concentrated itself in her attachment for Janie. If her feelings could have been analysed, a strain of remorse might have been found mingled with her tenderness. She had vigorously hated the child's mother during the short lifetime of the latter ; but at her death, one of those floods of reaction to which her nature was liable swept away her rancour and turned the tide of her impulses. There was within her too strong an instinct of justice to allow her to revenge her

fancied wrongs upon an innocent baby. Janie's helplessness had appealed to the latent mother element in her bosom; and as the child grew older, it was observed that she was the only being to whom Honoria was demonstrative of affection.

'I will not whop you,' she said; 'that would make my heart ache worse. Come, then, we will go to the apple-tree. Mr. Maddox, I really think that it is cooler out of doors than within. Will you walk with us to the ridge?'

The opportunity for which Maddox had inwardly longed presented itself, and he eagerly accepted Miss Longleat's invitation.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE ENCHANTRESS OF KOORALBYN.

HONORIA put on a straw hat which was lying on the verandah, and leading Janie by the hand, passed beneath the vine-trellis and through a wicket-gate on to the hill, which rose to a peak above the house, and sloped in wave-like mounds downwards to the plain. Here, in the shadow of the ridge, it was always green, and usually cool.

Honoria and Dyson strolled, side by side, to a little knoll over which a giant apple-tree extended its long branches, hoary with the greyish-green moss coveted by Janie's childish heart.

'It's like black Solomon's beard,' cried the child, clutching at a pendent bough.

Honoria seated herself upon the bank, while Dyson filled Janie's pinafore with moss, and sent her to the gully to gather fringed violets before the blossoms closed at mid-day.

‘But what for, Mr. Dyson?’ cried Janie, insistently; ‘what for do the flowers shut up when it is time for my dinner?’

‘Ask Angela,’ said Dyson; ‘she knows all about the flowers. Now run away, and do not come back till we call you.’

There was a crisp determination in his manner which made the child look at him wonderingly; but she departed, and he was alone with Honoria. Though he seemed outwardly calm, his pulses were throbbing fast. She had all the sweet unconsciousness of a coquette. The little episode with Janie had filled Dyson’s heart with fresh longing. A woman incapable of love, he thought, could not have smiled so tenderly upon the child. The softened expression still lingered on her face as she idly plucked the violets which grew among the grass beside her, and heaped them on her lap. Presently she threw off her hat, and leaning her head against the rough bark of the tree, looked up through a screen of leaves to the blue sky above.

‘This satisfies me,’ she said, as though brokenly taking up the thought which had been in her mind during her previous conversation with Dyson. ‘This contents me for a time. I have no poetic sympathy with nature. The flowers have no voice for me, as they have for Angela. I prefer intercourse with humanity. But there is a warm delight in such a day as this; in the humming of insects above and around me; in the flutter of the leaves as the breeze stirs the branches; in the feeling that every blade of grass is growing, and the smallest ant enjoying existence, that seems to still my unsatisfied longing for something different. I often come here with Janie when I am out of spirits, and I forget for a little while that I myself want to grow and live.’

Dyson knew not how to reply. He had fancied for a moment that her thoughts were travelling with his own; and

now he found them far upon another road. The air-like barrier which always seemed to divide them had never been more keenly felt by him. She looked down and caught his wistful glance, meeting it with her frank smile, at once seductive and chilling.

He longed to know how much of her unconsciousness was genuine; but in some of her moods he found her quite incomprehensible: he could not penetrate the dramatic instinct, which in her temperament carried emotion to the pitch demanded by the part she was playing, but never hurried her beyond it.

'You said just now,' he exclaimed, 'that you wished me to stay in Leichardt's Town this winter—to be near you, to live your life. I know you too well to read your speeches literally, but I should like to find out how much you do care for my society. I have an idea that you are not quite as false to me as you have been to some other men, and that when you say gracious things to me—you do sometimes when you are in the vein—there is a grain of meaning in them.'

Honoria nodded.

'That is quite true. I look upon you as my best friend, though I know quite well that there are many points in which I don't please you. Perhaps if you liked me better, you would not see my faults.'

'I should see no faults in you,' said Maddox, 'if you had the crowning virtue of womanly sensibility.'

'What!' she cried, 'you think me strong-minded. You are very much mistaken in your idea of my character. I have no force of will whatever.'

'I think that you are cruel,' said Maddox. 'It gives you pleasure to see your fellow-creatures suffer.'

'In other words, I am a coquette. It would be more to the purpose if you said that men were fools.'

'The last time that I was here,' said Dyson, 'you were doing your best to make a fool of an unfortunate young man whom I sincerely pitied. May I ask how long it has been your habit to take midnight strolls with your admirers?'

'Oh, that has been rankling in your mind, and now you have come to scold me. Were you concerned upon my account or upon that of the unfortunate young man? Well, there will not be another opportunity for compromising Mr. Byng. That tête-à-tête by the lagoon finished his business. He is going to England in April, unless, indeed, he commits suicide before the ship sails. Come,' she added, 'you must not blame me if I prefer being amused out of doors to being stifled within, in an atmosphere of prosiness and vulgarity. Is it my fault that Angela, poor child! does not interest me, that Mr. Ferris's rhapsodies irritate me, and that Aunt Pen's twaddle bores me? Can I help it if my father's habits and manners jar upon me? I am odious for saying this, but it is true. My nature is pitched in a different key to his; it may be higher or lower—I often think that it is lower. I hope that you are not shocked at my frankness, but surely we know each other too well to play at propriety.'

'I wish that you would always be frank with me. Let me know you as you really are—that is all I want. I can see that your temperament is at war with your companions and surroundings. You are fitted for a higher life—and your nature is so impressionable; externals affect you deeply—that is your misfortune. But I am grieved to hear that there is a want of sympathy between you and your father. You are the motive of his existence.'

'Is that so?' said Honoria, softly. 'Poor papa! I don't deserve to be so much cared for. Yet,' she added thoughtfully, 'if his affection is anything more than pride in my appearance, and a general satisfaction in me as a possession which contributes to his sense of importance, he does not

let me see it. I suppose that we are neither of us demonstrative of our feelings. He is very kind to me ; it pleases him to see me well dressed, courted, and admired ; he gives me plenty of money ; he is indulgent of my fancies—but there it ends. I am only a part of his success—not of his inner life. He has educated me above his level ; we have nothing in common. I cannot tell him what is passing through my mind, nor does he speak to me unreservedly about himself ; it is as though we had each something to hide. I have been alone ever since my childhood. But what is the use of troubling about me ? You cannot make me either better or worse. Go on talking about yourself. I want to feel certain that you will be Minister for Lands.'

'Honoriam,' said Dyson, while a sudden flame darted from his eyes, 'what should I care whether you were good or bad, so long as I could make you love me ? It has been in my mind to speak for a long time ; but I wanted to be more sure of you—and so I waited and watched, till I am ashamed of myself for hanging upon you like a dog ; and now I have determined to do so no longer. Suspense is unendurable. The real reason why I am doubtful about accepting the appointment in the Ministry is because if I do so I must be brought closer to you. I should be on a continual rack. I could not escape from the sight or thought of you. If you cannot love me, it will be best that I should hide myself in the bush, or go out west and try exploring again.'

'That would be weak,' said Honoriam, quietly. 'I had imagined you different ; I thought that you were strong.'

A red flush passed over Dyson's face, and he did not reply for a moment.

'Very well,' he said. 'At least you shall not say that I am weak. I was right ; you *are* a cruel woman.'

Honoriam bent a little towards him, looked at him swiftly, then drew back against the tree.

‘I don’t want to seem cruel,’ she said, ‘but I must think.’

‘It is not possible that you can be taken by surprise,’ said Dyson. ‘I have been for two years at your beck and call. You must have seen into my heart during that time. Sometimes you have been more than kind, sometimes indifferent. I have never felt sure of you for a day—indeed, I have often doubted whether you *could* love. Strange to say, it is your very egotism which leads me to hope. I know that I have little enough to offer an ambitious woman like you, but I think that I understand you well enough to make you happy.’

‘If I married you,’ said she quickly, as she spoke breaking into pieces of different lengths a twig that she had picked up from the ground, ‘I should live just the same kind of life ; if anything it would be tamer, and I should have no new sensations.’

‘Good heavens!’ exclaimed Dyson. ‘What do you mean?’

‘I dare say that you’ll think me a bold sort of girl,’ continued Honoria, looking at him levelly with her large eyes. ‘I don’t know whether I am or not ; but why should I not say what is in my mind? You doubt whether I have any capacity for loving. Perhaps not, but there is a kind of feeling that I should like to know if it be possible. I have dreamed of it ; I am sure that it exists. If I married you I should go on dreaming of it, but I should never know it. And yet, if it wasn’t for that, I think I might be happy with you ; it would be a placid, monotonous existence, but it ought to satisfy a woman. I am not easily contented. I am always wanting more—more than I have got. I have thought of it a great deal ; of course I knew what you wished. I have sometimes fancied that it might be—now I am certain that it never can be. There is no use in talking of it.’



‘Stay!’ urged Dyson. ‘You say that you have thought of it a great deal, but perhaps always from your present point of view. You have not considered that when a woman marries, all her interests, her thoughts, and feelings must change. She becomes quite a different person. It is the quiet, inward joy that makes her life complete.’

‘No, no,’ cried Honoria, ‘mine would be utterly incomplete. I need passion, excitement. I have tried to look at the matter from another point of view; I have observed the married people I have met. They think themselves happy; their lives would suffocate me. I should hate my husband in the same way that I detest men when they make themselves ridiculous by falling in love with me; or if I did not hate him, I should merely tolerate him, which would be worse. There must be passions that are real, or they would not be written of in books and acted on the stage. Not that I believe in sentiment. To be sentimental is as bad as being humdrum; but I like the quick stirring of my pulses, the quiver which goes through my body when there is a crisis of emotion. What is the use of living unless one can gauge one’s capacity for sensation?’

Dyson was silent for several moments; then he said very quietly:

‘What you tell me decides my fate. I should be a mean-spirited creature if I tormented you any longer. Our lives must lie apart. I must scrunch out the thought of you, and school myself to indifference. I would not marry you as you are. You would always be hankering after what, with me, you could never have, and we should both be wretched. You are right. You will never love me. I give up striving to gain what is hopeless.’

His tone raised in her mind an uneasy suspicion of his desertion. His constrained utterance was the mask to deep agitation, but this she hardly realised. He had been her

slave ; she could not bear to release him. As she regarded him with the critical eyes of a possible wife, she asked herself whether it were indeed well that she should let him go.

There was in his appearance and manner just those traces of hard living and rude service, that slight roughness of feature and lack of delicate refinement in language and bearing, that jarred upon her sensibilities and made her less awake to the energy and reliability of his character, and the manliness and frank nobility of his expression. But for that troublesome fastidiousness which demanded an aristocratic brow, smooth hands, and European address, she might have acknowledged him as a lover of whom she might justly feel proud.

Honorina was neither more nor less than a woman. She bent forward, intercepting his glance till he was forced to meet her smile, and said coquettishly :

‘You give me up very readily. I thought that you prided yourself upon your tenacity of purpose.’

‘How little you know me!’ he exclaimed bitterly. ‘A definite aim I would follow for years ; but there is something unmanly in the pursuit of a shadow. Your love is no more to me than that ; it is better that I should face the truth. After realising that you were capable of passion, I could not be content with the pale attachment that I know is all you can give me. To me cold kisses and lukewarm sympathy would be more insupportable than open dislike. But you think I do not suffer. You know nothing of the stabbing pain that has struck my heart, when on a sudden, as though by a flash of light, I have seen your indifference. But I comforted myself with the thought that I fared no better and no worse than any other man in my place. Now I feel that I must tear you from me, even though I bleed in doing so. Disappointment has always been my portion, and what does it matter if I die as solitary as I’ve lived ? There

are other objects in the world for a man besides loving and marrying. Do you remember a little photograph of yourself that you gave me before I went out on that miserable Gundaroo expedition? I have worn it, in a locket hung on my watch-chain, ever since; once it turned the point of a black's spear. That will show you how even as a child I cared for you. I hardly knew how much I loved you till I was stricken down with fever in the bush. I thought that I was at my last gasp. God! it *was* lonely! You know what it must be—to die of fever and thirst out there. We had been for two days without water, and the men were all out searching. In my delirium I saw you standing beside me, with your sweet face bent over mine, and your long brown hair floating over your shoulders. It was like the vision of an angel. I could not die while you looked at me. You stayed beside me till the men came back. They had found a waterhole, and as I revived with the drops they poured down my throat, you vanished. After that I constantly thought of you, and though I'm not a man to believe in supernatural influences, I have always looked upon that fancy of my sickness as a sort of omen that some day your life would be a part of mine. It's not to be so, and I'll make a fool of myself no longer. Shall I look for Janie?

'Stay a moment,' said Honoria. 'Janie is down by the gully, happy with her flowers. 'Mr. Maddox,' she added, her manner changing from coquetry to tenderness with one of those capricious alternations which were peculiar to it, 'I'm sorry that I grieved you. If you understood me better, you would know what I feel . . . It would be like giving up one's chances in a lottery when one was certain of holding the winning number—like one's heart stopping suddenly when it had been beating violently with expectation. If you would let us go on as we were before, for a

time—I—I can't bind myself now—I want to see more of the world—of other people.'

'No,' said Dyson, 'we cannot go back. I meant that our talk to-day should put us on a different footing towards each other. I have said my say. You have spoken what was in your mind. If your heart ever changes, I shall see it soon enough ; but, as far as the future goes, I shall put from me all hope of making you my wife. If you want a friend, I'll be one to you ; but I will try not to be your lover, and I'll keep away from you as much as possible.'

Honoria jumped up from the grass, her cheeks aflame ; but at this moment nearer loving him than she had ever been in her life. But, as she watched him move away, she felt as though she almost hated him. He had placed her in a false position. He had made her feel humiliated and resentful.

She turned her back upon him, and walked hurriedly across the grass, calling Janie in sharper tones than were her wont.

The child ran to her sister, her pinafore and her tiny hands filled with wild-flowers, and when she saw Dyson departing, cried loudly to him to return. But he walked determinedly on towards the stable, and bade Cobra Ball fetch out his horse.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE FERRIS MÉNAGE.

MISS LONGLEAT lingered on the plain with Janie, till there was no probability of again encountering Mr. Maddox. When, a little after one, she returned to the house, the Ferris family were all assembled in the dining-room waiting her re-entrance in order to begin luncheon.

The old man had arrived from Kooya a short time before. He sat a little apart, with his hands clasping those of his daughter, who was kneeling on a low stool at his feet, while Mrs. Ferris, bustling about the table, asked discursive questions touching his trip to town.

Angela was slender and fair, with the appearance of frail health which is denoted by great delicacy of limb, waxen complexion, and violet stains beneath the eyes. She was barely seventeen, and looked still younger. Her features were of the purity of a cameo, her forehead low, and her eyebrows full and extremely arched. Her mouth, pale rather than red, was of almost infantine softness, the lower lip drooping in a manner which suggested weakness of character. Her grey eyes, lovely in colour and shape, had a blank abstracted gaze, and were at once dreamy and shallow.

‘I am sorry to have kept you waiting,’ said Honoria, returning with excessive coldness Mr. Ferris’s greeting. ‘After all, Aunt Pen, there was no need for you to trouble yourself. You might have had luncheon in your own cottage. Mr. Maddox has gone on to Leichardt’s Town.’

It was tacitly understood that when Mr. Ferris was at home the two families should dine apart; in company only when Miss Longleat entertained male visitors during her father’s absence, and upon such occasions the Premier had stipulated that Mrs. Ferris should preside as chaperon to his daughter.

‘You see,’ whispered Mr. Ferris to his wife, with an air of irritated complaint, as Honoria laid aside her hat in an inner chamber, ‘she does not want me here; she did not notice me; she treats me as if I were the dirt; she never shook hands with me.’

‘You old fool!’ said Mrs. Ferris, who had a brusque, cheerful method of disposing of her lord’s grievances, ‘when

polished silver's the fashion, who cares for old gold? A girl that has just parted with her sweetheart hasn't got eyes for old folk. Well, go on about this Mr. Barrington. I'll believe in your opinion, Anthony; for, in spite of your blather about art, ye don't want for wits—the man is no ordinary new chum, that's certain.'

'Who are you talking about?' asked Honoria.

'My old man has picked up a kindred spirit in Kooya—an Englishman on his way to Lord Dolph's, and, as I say, no common new chum, if his story about the Guards is true. Things go by contraries out here. It was *only* the other day we sent a lord's son to the huts. Butchers and baronets—lords and loafers—it's all one. I'll just say two and two make four to balance my mind.'

'You have got a new book, Angel,' said Honoria, pointing to a freshly-bound volume in the girl's lap. 'Do you like it?'

'It is a translation from the German. I have not read it yet,' replied Angela, coldly.

'There's a little fib,' said Mrs. Ferris, in a tone of good-humoured contradiction that grated upon Angela's nerves. 'Why, it's only a minute ago that I came in and heard you telling your father about the mermaids and water-spirits, and such like nonsense that the book is filled with. Fie! you are too big a girl to heed such fairy-tales now.'

'Angela!' said Janie, pricking up her ears at the mention of fairy-tales, 'you said that you'd tell me about the spirits which float under the lilies on the lagoon. Nobody sees them but you, and you promised to put them in a picture, so that I can understand.'

'Come,' said Mrs. Ferris, 'and let us feed our bodies as well as our souls. There was no need to worry about my scrappy lunch; I never thought, Honoria, but that you'd have persuaded Mr. Maddox to stay. Why was he so anxious to be off?'

‘He had business in Leichardt’s Town,’ replied Honoria, briefly.

‘I am told that he is to be the new Minister for Lands,’ said Mr. Ferris.

Honoria was silent for a few moments. Presently she asked a question about the political prospects.

‘They say that the Ministry cannot last,’ said Mr. Ferris. ‘The heavy floods inland will prevent many of the western members from reaching Leichardt’s Town in time for the opening, and the numbers are so even that if the Opposition brings forward a motion of want of confidence it is an absolute certainty that the Government will go out.’

‘You speak as though you wished my father to be beaten,’ said Honoria, with temper.

‘I’m not a party man,’ answered Mr. Ferris. ‘The convictions of most people lie in their pockets, and I’m not above the weaknesses of humanity. I had a fancy for being in town this winter, and your father could easily have put me into a Government sinecure, but he was too *honest* for that—ha! ha!’—Mr. Ferris uttered his disagreeable chuckle—‘and it’s of small consequence to me whether he or Middleton is in power.’

‘As for me,’ remarked Mrs. Ferris, meditatively, ‘I must pin my political faith on something; and though I dare say it’s very likely that the Premier is mistaken, I’d rather take him for my block than fashion my opinions at haphazard.’

Honoria ate her luncheon in irritated silence, and seized the first opportunity which presented itself of quitting the table. She was in a mood in which small annoyances jarred upon her, and she wished to take a quiet retrospect of the scene she had enacted with Maddox; just as a lover of the drama will re-read, in solitude, with keen delight a play, the performance of which has deeply interested him.

Mr. Ferris’s mode of lapping his cream, which, indeed,

resembled that of her father, interfered with the flow of her thoughts. She reflected that it would add considerably to her happiness if the Premier would for once depart from his political creed, and by rewarding Mr. Ferris's services with a Government post, remove him from Kooralbyn. But he would be equally odious in Leichardt's Town. The old man's obnoxious presence was one of her minor sores; and she, in common with other inhabitants of the district, was at a loss to explain the link that connected Thomas Longleat with his storekeeper.

It was still more inexplicable from the undercurrent of jealousy which the utterance of some biting allusion or cynical remark on the part of Mr. Ferris continually betrayed.

Honorina had been at school in Sydney when, ten years before this date, Anthony Ferris, with his wife and child, had arrived in Leichardt's Land. Poor, and apparently friendless, he had made his way to Kooralbyn, and after an interview with Mr. Longleat, was immediately appointed storekeeper, at four times the rate of salary enjoyed by his predecessor. The act had always been quoted as illustrative of Longleat's disinterested generosity; but Sammy Deans, a certain free selector upon Kooralbyn, who cultivated Byron and Shakespeare, and had established a vinous intimacy with Mr. Ferris, always shook his head mysteriously, and declared that he knew better.

Honorina had never coincided with the popular view of Mr. Longleat's adoption of Anthony Ferris. She was of opinion that her father's bountiful impulses ought at least to be subservient to her antipathies. She disliked Mr. Ferris, rather for the reason adduced against Dr. Fell than from any assignable cause. The veiled animosity to which Longleat, pompous, self-engrossed, and in a manner liberal-minded, was blind, had been quickly made patent to her keener perceptions. She saw that he disliked her father,



and more particularly herself ; and resented as a personal grievance that, in spite of her frequently-expressed aversion, Mr. Ferris's society was thrust upon her in a way at which she was unable to take open umbrage.

In truth, he was not an agreeable old man. He was variable as the winds, sometimes morose and taciturn, at others garrulous and self-complacent, but always displaying that morbid vanity which is the peculiar attribute of unappreciated artists, whose ideal aspirations transcend the critical capacity of their age.

Mr. Ferris justified his failure by the self-gratulatory reflection that genius which misses the aim of circumstance, like steam that exhausts its energy upon the air, is no less the potential regenerator of the universe. He had painted pictures which no connoisseur would purchase, and which had never cleared the portals of a high-class exhibition. He had written poems combining fervid metaphor and stilted inanity, doomed to be numbered amongst the myriads of rejected addresses which represent the waste of so much nervous energy and the expenditure of so great an amount of vicarious emotion.

At the age of forty-five he had collapsed in a fit of despair, had thrown away his brushes and forsworn the exercise of his imagination, and had sunk into the apathy of disappointment as Thomas Longleat's storekeeper. He was embittered to the core, and often, when he was alone, would weep puerile tears over the miscarriage of his favourite ambition. Nevertheless ease was grateful to him. He had endured a hand-to-hand fight with starvation, and for the first few years of his life in Australia blessed the means by which he had acquired freedom from actual privation ; but, as time went on, jealousy gathered like a slow volcano in his breast, and comparison of his own position with that of his patron was a ready goad to animosity.

Good Mrs. Ferris, incomprehending soul, knew nothing of the inward demon which devoured her lord, or if she guessed at its existence, laid it to the charge of her own shortcomings in not having presented him with the son for which she knew he longed.

'My dear,' she would say to Honoria in one of her confidential moments—for her young charge Aunt Pen, as she was called, professed an unbounded love and admiration—'Mr. Ferris always had an extraordinary notion that his son and mine would set the world on fire. I don't know, I'm sure, what put it into his head, for I never laid claim to any remarkable ideas; my family were always steady, respectable folk, but the old fool would keep drilling into me that it was the combination which produced geniuses, till I fairly flew round in his face and said, "Bother your combinations and your geniuses. If ever I have a son, which doesn't seem likely, I hope he may be a dolt." It was flying in the face of Providence, my love, for the Almighty is not agreeable to having His works cut out for Him like the pattern of a gown. Never a son have I had, and Mr. Ferris has been fain to content himself with a weakly slip of a girl who has no notion of anything except her painting, and her mooning ways.'

Upon Angela Mr. Ferris's hopes were centred. She was the apple of his eye, the joy of his life. He had brought her up in accordance with his own theories of artistic education, and the result had been a strange mixture of ignorance and premature knowledge. He had brought all external conditions to bear upon the development of her peculiar temperament; had, as he expressed it, 'cradled her in the lap of inspiration,' had allowed her to run riot with nature, and had from her childhood encouraged the free play of her vague poetic fancies. He would not permit his wife to teach her needlework or any ordinary feminine

accomplishment, nor would he suffer her to be fettered by the conventional rules which from the hour of her birth govern a woman's existence. No restriction was placed upon her childish love of reading, and she was at liberty to roam as she would through the fields of strange fact and flowery fancy. Thus the child's mind was a storehouse of fairy legends and half-understood classical myths. From her youth she had been taught to regard her pencil as the interpreter of her inmost yearnings, and the vent for her exuberant imagination. She was solitary in her habits, and fond of wandering alone in the bush; but so greatly had her gentle ways endeared her to all with whom she came in contact, that even the most savage of the blacks who frequented the mountains would not have dreamed of harming or frightening her.

## CHAPTER X.

### HERCULES AND OMPHALE.

LATE in the afternoon of that day upon which Dyson Maddox had visited Kooralbyn, Mr. Longleat found himself crossing the Leichardt in the ferry-boat that plied between the north side and Emu Point.

As he had sat in the club after his office-work was over, Mr. Vallancy had entered, and had started a game of whist at five-shilling points. The man was flushed and unsteady. He had called for brandy and soda-water, had drunk freely, and had brought into the room an atmosphere of bickering and braggadocio peculiarly obnoxious to the Premier. He had made several gibing political allusions, and had so far succeeded in ruffling Mr. Longleat's temper that the latter

had left the club. He walked towards the ferry, and took his seat in the boat before he had quite decided whether he would call on Mrs. Vallancy or not. Inclination carried the day. Before he had reached the opposite side, his impulse had settled into resolve.

It was not Mr. Longleat's custom to make afternoon calls, and Mrs. Vallancy's neighbours were considerably surprised to see the huge white-clad figure enter the wicket-gate and tap gently at the half-closed venetian shutters of the drawing-room. The Premier always wore white linen in summer, spotless as though it had just left the hands of the laundress. He usually carried himself erect, with a visible swelling of his chest and elevation of his head, as though he had indeed the state secrets of an important colony in his keeping. There was just a spice of ostentation in his bearing—of self-assertion in his walk. To-day his appearance was less pompous; he stepped more quickly; he looked a trifle sheepish. Without having actually analysed the nature of his attraction towards Mrs. Vallancy, he had honestly struggled against the infatuation that since the coach-journey had been gradually intensifying, and felt himself guilty of a moral lapse in voluntarily placing himself under its influence, in the same manner that the drunkard, supremely conscious of sober intent, resists for a time the fatal glass, and at last yields, trusting to the shreds of self-control left him to bind him against committal.

Mrs. Vallancy, sitting alone in her drawing-room, observed the Premier's approach, and herself admitted him. As soon as he saw her face, Longleat felt certain that she had been weeping. To-day she was clad in white, and wore a yellow rose in the front of her dress; her voice was subdued and melancholy.

She took Mr. Longleat's rough hand with her soft, ringed fingers, and led him to a seat of cushioned gilt wicker-work,

ill-suited enough to the Premier's substantial form. The room was full of dainty knickknacks—small tables, Japanese screens, and cabinets, and expensive ornaments such as might readily form part of a collection of keepsakes. A rich yet faint odour exhaling from a bowl of creamy magnolias pervaded the apartment. The green jalousies were partially drawn, and the room was dim and cool.

'You have remembered me,' said Mrs. Vallancy in joyful tones. 'Good things sometimes come when they are sorely needed; a visit from you is one of them. I'm not very well to-day—a headache—that is always a woman's excuse when she is cross or unhappy.'

'I am afraid that something is troubling you,' said Mr. Longleat, destitute of the fine tact which observes but does not remark.

'And if there were,' she replied, in a tone more pathetic than ungracious, 'who would care?' She walked to the window, lifted the jalousie, looked out, plucked a rose with which she toyed, and returned. Seating herself on a low chair close to her visitor, she leaned her chin upon her hand and regarded him, with a queer, inscrutable gleam shining in her dark eyes. '*You* care,' she said presently, 'perhaps—a little.'

Mr. Longleat wiped his face with a silk pocket-handkerchief. His heart throbbed with pity, and with a generosity which he dared not proffer. 'Tell me what's the matter,' he said.

She shook her head in a deprecatory manner, but still led him on.

'I can't bear to see it,' continued Mr. Longleat, hurriedly, taking her hand in his. 'It—it goes agen me, somehow. A woman like you ought to be kept from fretting and worry. You're one of the prettiest creatures God ever made; it's only right that you should be wrapped round with riches, to

hinder the hard things of life from knocking agen you and hurting you. . . . Tell me, is it—is it money?’

She gave a little nod, then wrenched her hand away. ‘It isn’t all,’ she said; ‘not all, or half. . . . And what is the use of telling you? It won’t make you think any the better of me, or like me any the more. I dare say that you’ll despise me in your heart for speaking about my troubles to a stranger like you.’

‘Don’t call me a stranger,’ said Longleat, earnestly. ‘I’m a plain-spoken man, and I go at a thing straight, without beating about the bush. Look here, Mrs. Vallancy, if you’ll let me call myself your friend, you’ll find that with me the word means a good deal. I’m proud to think that you’ve honoured me so far with your confidence. You needn’t be afraid of speaking out; it—it grieves me to see you unhappy.’

‘Yes, I am sure of that,’ said she, gazing earnestly into his face. ‘If I had not thought so, should I have talked to you as frankly as I have done—all along? Your heart is so large, so noble, that you can find room in it even for me. You can feel for my troubles almost as you would feel for those of your daughter’—Mr. Longleat reddened, but she maintained an innocent composure—‘isn’t it so? It comforts me to think that some one cares for me a little. You have heard about me—about my husband,’ she went on, with her eyes downcast upon the matting. ‘You know the sort of people we are, or, rather, the sort of people that we are taken to be. You can guess the kind of life I lead—no, you cannot guess half or quarter of its wretchedness—and you would despise me if I told you. . . . You know that we are deeply in debt; that he gambles—drinks; that he is often cruel to me. The burden of all our misery falls on my shoulders. That was what I meant when I said that I could be happy if he were sent away out of temptation—if

he could be sent to a place ever so far north. . . . He would go—he wants money—and I should be left here. He would not be so cruel as to make me accompany him ; he knows that a hot climate is almost fatal to me. I should be justified in refusing. . . . And then I should be free. Oh, think what that would be to me ! I should be spared harassing scenes—daily worry, I should have peace.'

'Yes,' said Longleat slowly, and pausing between his words. 'If—if there were—such a place—that he could be sent to.'

'There is,' she whispered, looking at him eagerly ; 'there is—Gundaroo.'

Longleat blanched. He shifted uneasily in his chair, and sat silent, his eyes upon the ground. She went on, in calmer, silvery tones :

'Don't think that I have asked for it. . . . I have no right—the boon would be too great. And you may only despise me. It seems terrible to wish one's husband to go away—I should not dare to let him know it. I am a hypocrite—I am selfish and heartless—but I long—oh ! I long for rest. Truth is harder to face than the worst which one's imagination can picture. I'm a cowardly woman ; I quail before rough usage. I like tender care, and soft words, and delicate clothes, and of all these my life is barren. I never loved my husband—why should I not say so to you ?—and he knows it. I was compelled to marry him ; and now I am paying the penalty of my weakness and folly.'

'You must not blame yourself,' said Mr. Longleat. 'You've been sinned against, and cruelly used. I left the club just now because your husband came in, and I could not sit comfortably in the same room with him. If I feel like that, what must it be to you ? It's a sin that a girl's married misery should be borne only by herself—and then that it should be thought a shame for her to speak ! **How**

is it possible for an innocent, trusting creature to tell a bad man from a good one? Her father should look after that. Do you think,' he added, and he trembled as he spoke, 'that I could rest easy in my grave if I had knowingly let my girl marry to her wretchedness? God forgive me all sins, but never that one if I'm like to commit it.'

'It mightn't be your fault altogether,' said Mrs. Vallancy. 'Your daughter might be wilful—you don't know. I was wilful always. It wasn't entirely because of my father and mother. I thought, as they did, that I should be rich, and live at ease—you see, I don't wish you to think me better than I am—and I am punished; heaven knows that I am poor enough now.'

'What's money, after all?' said Longleat. 'What's the good of it but to make the people one loves happy? I've got plenty. That is the light in which I look at it. . . . And that is what I meant when I said that there might be ways of helping you. If you would accept a loan from me—to relieve you from your difficulties and put you straight—it 'ud be nothing to me.'

'We shall never have any money; it would be impossible for us to repay you.'

'But friends—you said that we were friends,' stammered Mr. Longleat—'and there needn't be any question of that sort. It's what I've done scores of times for pals on the road—and you——'

She laughed softly.

'Friendship does not often imply a partnership in purse. No—no. Don't talk of a loan. I understand you. You have a generous heart. Another woman might have been offended. I am not—but it wouldn't do. You can't serve me in that way. Believe me, that I am most grateful for your sympathy; it warms and comforts me. Now, let us drop the subject of my troubles. I have said too much. I



forbid you to mention them again. Tell me about yourself—about your daughter. I am jealous of her—I envy her.

‘Why?’ asked Mr. Longleat, in surprise.

‘For the reason that we are both women. Has she not everything that I lack? Beauty—ah! you need not shake your head. If I was pretty once, I know that I am prematurely old and faded now—love, admiration, wealth; and above all, has she not *you*—a father who adores her?’

‘You’re right there,’ said Mr. Longleat, speaking with rough earnestness. ‘I worship the clothes she wears—the ground she treads. That’s about it. I only value what I am and what I’ve got, according by what I am able to do for *her*. And yet—it’s a queer thing—I don’t mind saying it to *you*, but I could not say it to anyone else—least of all to her—something in my throat ’ud stop me. Women aren’t the same. . . . For all that, it’s true. I love her as I love my life. I’ve told myself, when I’ve done a good day’s work, “It’s to make a lady of Honie.” She’s not like her father. I’ve meant that she should grow up different. There’s sorts and sorts. I’m one sort, and I’ve educated her to be another; I’ve prepared myself for it—but, Lord! for all that, it’s hard. I couldn’t talk out to her as I’m talking to you now.’

‘No,’ said Mrs. Vallancy, in a tone half-sympathetic, half-interrogative.

‘It’s true. I’m not one to growl over the crop I’ve sown, but it’s a trifle hard when a man can’t reap his own harvest.’

‘You mean,’ said Mrs. Vallancy, ‘that your daughter will marry?’

‘I’m prepared for that,’ said Longleat. ‘If she marries to my mind, I’ll not complain at losing her. All I ask is that I may be able to cotton with the man she’s set her heart on. I’m pretty quick at seeing the wrong side of human nature. I know a pair of honest eyes when they

look into mine. And her husband must be an Australian. She owes it to the country that has given her her money, and that has made a man of her father. . . . Her marriage wasn't what I meant. There's a kind of wall between us that seems to grow thicker as she grows older—and we can't either of us climb it. She's a lady with ladies' ways. I'm nothing to her but a rough beggar that has knocked agen the world and doesn't understand her. She's stand-offish, and I'm huffed—and so it goes on ; and for all my love, we go farther apart. . . . You see I'm telling you my troubles now.'

He sat silent for several moments, with a harassed look upon his face. She moved a little closer to him, and laid her hand upon his.

'It's different with you,' he said. 'You seemed to be my friend somehow from the first. I ain't shy at speaking to you. As I said before, what is money between friends? Or if you would let me arrange matters with your husband. . . . He does not like me, but I do not think that he would make any difficulty about accepting a loan from me.'

'No, no ; that would be impossible,' she said ; 'we could never repay you,' she repeated.

'You hurt me,' said Longleat, 'when you talk about repayment. It is as though your pride wouldn't let you accept anything from a rough fellow like me. That's how I take it.'

'Indeed, you do me injustice,' cried Mrs. Vallancy, warmly. 'I thank you with my whole heart for your noble offer. Let me accept your friendship, your sympathy, which are sweet indeed to me, but let the other matter rest.'

She rose, and moved to the window under pretext of raising the blind, but in reality to avoid following up the turn which the conversation had taken. In truth, she was anxious that he should not at that moment divine how far

upon some future occasion she might be ready to avail herself of his generosity.

Mrs. Vallancy walked out to the verandah, and then returned.

‘My husband will soon be coming back,’ she said.

‘I had better go,’ said Longleat, feeling that he was dismissed. ‘I shall see you at the Opening of Parliament,’ he added, still lingering.

‘No ; I shall not be there.’

He pressed her for the motive of her absence.

‘Since you will have it,’ said she, ‘a woman’s reason. Why do women go to raree-shows. To wear new gowns. I have none, therefore I shall stay at home.’

‘Is it really so?’ asked Longleat, looking incredulously at her slim, white-robed figure.

‘Yes, truly. I owe Madame Sophie already more than I can pay her. I may tell you this, since I have refused to borrow your money. Now, good-bye.’

Longleat shook hands with Mrs. Vallancy and departed.

Some days later, a covered box was brought over from the north side, and left at the Emu Point cottage, accompanied by a note, in which Madame Sophie expressed her willingness to execute any further orders with which Mrs. Vallancy might favour her.

Upon opening the box, Constance found that the costume which she had coveted was placed at her disposal.

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When residing at Leichardt’s Town without his daughter, it was not Mr. Longleat’s habit to dine at The Bunyas. He was a man to whom masculine society afforded greater pleasure than any other, and though he neither drank nor smoked, making indeed a merit of the abstinence which he affirmed had contributed largely towards his success in life, the roystering conversation of the smoking-room, and the

political element which pervaded the club, was better suited to his taste than the more refined atmosphere of drawing-rooms.

But, upon the evening of his visit to Mrs. Vallancy, he departed from his usual rule, and, oppressed by an unaccountable sense of blankness, he ate his dinner at home in musing solitude, then retired to his study, where he surrounded, but did not occupy, himself with letters and books.

Never had his home appeared more devoid of companionship : never had the lack of sympathy in his life forced itself more strongly upon him. He would have given much to hear the sound of Janie's prattle—to be conscious of Honoria's sweet, if somewhat disdainful, presence. The current of his daily interests and ambitions seemed to have been suddenly checked, and he felt himself to be stranded helplessly upon an unknown shore.

He was vainly trying to concentrate his attention upon some official papers, when the door was opened, and the entrance of Dyson Maddox furnished an opportune stimulant to his jaded energies. The Premier greeted him warmly ; it was evident that the young man was a favourite.

'I am afraid that I am very late,' said Dyson. The Kooya coach was behindhand this evening. I looked into the club expecting to find you there.'

'I was obliged to go over some of Morrison's work, and could do it better here ; but I am not in the humour for poring over papers this evening. You got my letter, of course, and you have come down about the "Lands" appointment?'

'Yes,' replied Dyson, 'I have been turning the matter over in my mind ever since I heard from you. I dare say you will wonder that I should have given it a thought, except to feel gratified at the honour you have done me. I am most sensible of that ; but the fact is, there were both

public and private reasons. Are you sure that I am the man for the place ?

‘Not a doubt of it,’ said the Premier. ‘I have always had my eye upon you as a likely member of the Cabinet. The screw is not a primary object with you. We want independent men. Lycombe and Brown were thought of, but they are free lances, and we are at odds upon the Abolition Bill. It might have been a wise precaution to nail one of them just at this turn of affairs, but there would have been a split later. The other Ministers think with me. *You* are bound to stand and fall by our party, and you are fitted in every way for the office of Lands. I hope that you have made up your mind to accept.’

‘Yes, I have done so. I have put aside all private feeling in the matter. I came down by Kooralbyn to-day, and saw your daughter. You know what my hopes were, and you were good enough to encourage them. It is only fair to tell you that they are now at an end.’

‘What !’ exclaimed Mr. Longleat, looking up with an expression of concern. ‘Honorina has refused you ! You don’t mean to say so ! I could have sworn that she was fond of you. She is a flirt, is Honorina, and likes to be admired ; but I had my reasons for believing that you were the man she had set her heart on. This is a blow to me, Dyson. I don’t understand women. I own that I can’t make out my daughter.’

‘Perhaps I ought to say that some men might not have considered her refusal hopeless. She told me that she could not love me ; that she required excitement, passion, neither of which she could find in me ; that she wished to see more of the world, and half suggested that I should give her six months in which to make up her mind. I think she has some regard for me, but that is not the fashion in which I must be loved. If she has dreams of this kind, it is

better that she should seek their fulfilment. My wife must not come to me half-hearted.'

'Pooh! pooh!' said the Premier, visibly relieved. 'You cannot expect such a prize as Honoria to drop like a ripe cherry into your mouth. Women won't answer at once to the bit, they must be coaxed and humoured. You mustn't give up so quickly. I thought you had more pluck.'

'It is at an end,' said Dyson, grimly. 'I shall never try again unless your daughter's mode of thought changes entirely. She is restless and dissatisfied. She wishes to see life. Take her to England, Mr. Longleat. Let her have her fill. Throw her into intercourse with men of the upper classes, and give her an opportunity of choosing a husband to her taste. If she returns unmarried, it will be time enough for me to resume my suit.'

'By ——!' interrupted Mr. Longleat, fiercely, 'I have seen enough of Englishmen and of their doings. My daughter shall never marry a cursed aristocrat. She is the fruit of a free country, and in it her lot shall be cast.'

'If she will have it so; but she has a will of her own,' said Dyson. 'You have cultivated her intellect and perceptions; you have made her what she is. It is out of your power to control her likes and antipathies. Well! the subject is not a pleasant one for me. As far as I am concerned, let it drop. Now I want to show her that I am brave enough to live in her world without flinching from the pain of association with her interest and pursuits. I gratefully accept the appointment. It gives me an opportunity for which I have wished. I'll make the necessary arrangements with Cathcart, and take up my abode in Leichardt's Town for the winter.'

Then followed a political discussion which lasted long into the night, and through which it is not necessary to carry the reader.

## CHAPTER XI.

## ANGELA.

As Mr. Ferris had predicted, Barrington found existence at Dyraaba very monotonous. A week after his arrival he had almost decided with Lord Dolph that he was not of the stuff to make a satisfactory settler, and was casting about in his mind the possibility of obtaining a Government appointment by means of the interest which his family-name and connections would certainly procure for him. But opposed to this course was the unadvisability of disclosing more of his immediate antecedents than was necessary. The story of his retirement from the Guards could hardly be revealed in its nakedness, and would deepen in disgrace from the mystery in which it was shrouded.

The episode, which hinged upon a beautiful woman well-known in the London half-world, and on a money transaction in which, to do him justice, Barrington had been merely a victim to the knavish rapacity of others, was discreditable more from the social than the moral standard of culpability. Society must needs have a scapegoat, and in this instance Barrington had suffered a more severe punishment than he perhaps deserved.

Going to Australia had seemed an easy and efficacious mode of self-effacement; but his English experiences had hardly been of a nature to fit him for the rough actualities of a colonial career. With good looks, a pleasing address, and the prestige of high birth, he had possessed an *entrée* to the best European society. He had idealised epicurism, and had lived for the indulgence of refined sensation. Life to him was something more than a happy practical joke, a

combination of the labouring and Bohemian phases of existence, into which, by means of Swiss bridges, sport, pigs, the piano, and stretches of the imagination, a faint flavour of the pursuits of an English country gentleman might be introduced.

It was humiliating to have forced upon him the conviction that his super-sensuous dreams of feminine excellence must henceforth remain unfulfilled, or take shape in—a Maggie ; and that his æsthetic philosophy, which had reduced life to the level of artistic sensation, must in future be fed upon the excitement of cattle-hunting, the beauties of primeval nature, and the unrefined companionship that had as yet presented itself to him, and which was only endurable because it lacked the pretension of vulgarity.

One morning Lord Dolph, with a faint perception that his friend was bored and an amiable desire to further his matrimonial projects, proposed a ride to Kooralbyn. It was arranged that Maggie should accompany them, and that they should remain a few days. However, an hour before the time fixed for starting, as Barrington was packing his valise and mournfully regarding the crushed condition of his white shirts, Lord Dolph entered, excited and apologetic :

‘My dear fellow, I am awfully sorry, but I am really afraid that I must give up the expedition to Kooralbyn. Ward, the butcher, has just turned up from Barramunda. He wants to make up a mob of bullocks, and I’ve got twenty fat uns ready for the market. Couldn’t lose such a chance of selling. Mag and I must help to drive ’em in. Perhaps you wouldn’t mind going without us. Maggie will pilot you over the ranges on her way to the Blue Gum Camp ; then you have only to follow the river ; you can’t lose your way.’

Lady Dolph, who was in the sitting-room, giggled.



'Oh, no fear!' cried she. 'Come and saddle your horse, Mr. Barrington, and we'll be off.'

Lady Dolph looked very colonial in her short grey riding-habit and straw hat, under which her rosy, freckled face glowed with health and good-humour.

'I'll meet you round by the Boomerang Waterholes,' she said, in farewell to her husband. 'We must fly sharp,' she added, as she whipped her horse into a canter, 'for Dolph is so green about the stock that he'll be selling the wrong bullocks if I don't look smart after him.'

As he followed Lady Dolph Bassett's lead across the interminable ridges, Barrington reflected upon the advantages which a squatter would derive from marrying a wife who would 'look smart' after both her lord and his cattle.

'I suppose all Australian ladies ride well, and that sort of thing,' he remarked, pursuing a mental train of thought. 'Is Miss Longleat, for instance, clever about stock-keeping?'

'Honor!a!' cried Lady Dolph; 'gracious, no! She is much too fine to go out on the run. I dare say that she would not know a strawberry beast from a roan, if you asked her. But then you see she was educated in Sydney, and her father has always had lots of hands. She was not brought up to the saddle as I have been. But when a squatter lives ever so far up the Ubi, and his men go on the burst, what can he do but make his daughters help?'

Barrington had still further food for reflection, and Maggie continued:

'She'll be more your style, Mr. Barrington. She is English in her ways. She makes up to be European. You don't care about Australia; I can see that in a twinkling. Now Dolph likes the fun of it. Then he's different. It's rough in the bush, but it is not a bad sort of life. I dare say you think that I am rough too, but I'm pretty smart if

I like ; and if Dolph were to take me home I bet I'd soon pick up English manners. I've heard people say that is the beauty of Australian girls, they can turn their minds or their hands to anything.'

She escorted him to the river-bank, advising him to follow the course of the stream till he should arrive at a paddock-fence, which was near the crossing at Kooralbyn. Then she uttered a frank 'Good-bye ; don't get bushed ;' and trotted off to superintend the stock-collecting.

Not trusting himself out of sight of the green line which marked where the river ran, Barrington rode slowly along its windings. He passed beneath glossy chestnuts and spreading cedars, now beside murmuring shallows, and now by deep, mysterious pools, bordered by beds of fern and arum and crossed by fallen logs, against which lay heaped the refuse left by many a flood. The trees closed him in, meeting high above his head, and upon all sides seemed to diverge in interminable vistas. Sometimes a dip in the hills or a break of foliage would reveal a glimpse of distant mountains.

Occasionally a deep gully intersecting the creek would oblige him to make a circuit, till he found a passable spot ; or a sideling that afforded no foothold for his horse would necessitate a descent into the bed of the creek, where every now and then he would become bogged in a treacherous quicksand. But the sure-footed animal he rode, although unshod, was well-accustomed to rolling stones and slippery places, and would have found its own way to Kooralbyn without much guidance on the part of its rider.

At last Barrington reached a two-railed fence which sank on both sides into the water, and finding no outlet, followed it up to a set of slip-rails which admitted him into a paddock, whence in the distance he could perceive signs of habitation.

A herd of unbroken horses lifted up their heads as he passed, and with their long manes and tails flowing, scampered towards a belt of scrub that lay between the creek and the wooded ranges beyond it. Barrington rode along a bridle-track that presently brought him to a well-worn crossing. Below him there was a sweet murmuring of running water over a pebbly bottom, and the river divided itself into several narrow streams, merging lower down into one deep pool. Large crystals lay in the rocky bed, and a ti-tree, rising from the centre of an earth-girt stump at the junction of two rivulets, resisted the current which swirled and eddied round its bare roots and pendent foliage. Upon the opposite side stretched the wide plain of Kooralbyn.

It was a pretty, secluded spot. The creek-sides rose high and shelving, and were overgrown with mulgam plants now past fruiting, ferns, and a stiff green grass, of which the yellow bloom emitted a powerful aromatic perfume.

As Barrington let his horse drink, his eye wandered aimlessly along the banks, and a little distance down the stream were attracted by the flutter of a white dress through the trees.

A girl poised lightly upon a slippery log, which spanned a pool deep enough to render the prospect of immersion sufficiently alarming. She appeared to hesitate whether or not to advance, nervously drawing back her foot and clutching at the swaying branches of a wattle-tree that overhung the narrow bridge.

He saw that she was very young, hardly more than a child, and that she was also very pretty. The sweet helplessness of her face, and its dreamy, poetic expression, immediately interested him. He slipped off his horse, and hanging its bridle to a stump, walked along the bank to the girl's assistance.

'Are you afraid to cross?' he asked, with gentle courtesy. 'The log is rather slippery. Let me help you.'

Angela turned her large blue eyes upon him, and a flush overspread the waxen paleness of her skin. 'Thank you,' she said simply, 'I want to go home. I have often crossed here before, and it is the first time I have ever turned giddy; but just now I saw a snake in the water, and it startled me so that I feared I might fall.'

'It was a water-snake, perhaps,' replied Barrington. 'Can you see it still?'

'No,' answered Angela, and looked at him with her blank, appealing eyes. 'It might have been fancy. I sometimes do imagine that I see things which are not real. I had been reading'—she paused a moment, with her gaze fixed upon the water, and murmured, almost under her breath:

"The serpent's mailed and many-coated skin  
Shone through the plumes its coils were twined within."

Barrington glanced in surprise at a little green volume she held in her hand.

'You have been reading!' he repeated. 'My child, do they feed your poetic cravings upon such strong food as "Laon and Cythna"?''

Angela looked bewildered. 'It is beautiful, is it not?' she said. 'I am glad that you like it too. I did not think that anyone in Australia cared for poetry except father and myself.'

'Ah!' said Barrington. 'So, then, life in Australia is not all prosaic. Surely the voice of poetry echoes among these mountains. Shelley might have sung of the wild beauty of your forests.'

'You love them?' cried Angela, her face brightening to enthusiasm. 'Oh! so do I. I am never unhappy when I can wander among the trees and by the river. They tell me so much—so much that other people do not know. . . . But Mrs. Ferris would like best to pen me within doors, and teach me to do needlework.'

‘Mrs. Ferris is your mother?’ asked Barrington.

‘She is not my mother,’ replied Angela with a pettish accent. ‘My own mother is dead. Mrs. Ferris does not understand me. She thinks me foolish. But my father says that an artist is never comprehended by the outside world, and so I shut my lips, and dream and live my inner life—that is all one need wish for.’

‘I am gratified at your speaking to me so unreservedly,’ said Barrington, with the wish to test her.

Angela directed a swift glance at his face, and coloured again.

‘*You* are not like the others,’ she said simply. ‘When I saw you walking towards me I felt that I might trust you.’

‘I have heard that you are an artist,’ continued Barrington. ‘I should very much like to see your drawings.’

‘They are only studies,’ said Angela; ‘thoughts that rise in my mind and that I must express. By-and-by, my father will take me to Rome, and then I shall paint great pictures.’

‘Poor child!’ he murmured involuntarily.

‘Why? You think I shall fail,’ said Angela, sharply.

‘No,’ he replied. ‘You may have genius.’

‘Yes, I have genius,’ she answered, with a confident simplicity. ‘I am certain of it.’

‘Genius is a rare heritage,’ said Barrington. ‘I hope it may be yours. When I see your paintings I will tell you whether or not I believe that you possess it. Come, give me your hand; I will lead you across the log, and you shall guide me to Kooralbyn. I have not told you my name yet; it is Barrington, and I am a friend of Lord Dolph Bassett’s. I have met your father at Kooya.’

‘Oh!’ said Angela; ‘you are the Englishman of whom he spoke.’

‘Probably. You can tell me whether Mr. Longleat is at the station?’

‘There is no one there,’ replied Angela, ‘except my father and Mrs. Ferris. Miss Longleat is in Leichardt’s Town.’

The pang of disappointment which Barrington certainly experienced was mitigated by the prospect of this innocent being’s society. He took her hand and piloted her across the log, then returned, got on his horse, and rode through the shallow water to the opposite bank ; here he dismounted and walked on by Angela’s side.

‘Are you always alone in your rambles?’ asked Barrington. ‘Have you no companions?’

‘I have my father and the birds and the flowers. I want no others.’

‘Does not Miss Longleat ever walk with you?’

Angela shook her head and smiled inscrutably.

‘Tell me,’ said Barrington, becoming interested, ‘of what do you think when you are roaming by yourself through the forest?’

‘I make pictures in my mind,’ said Angela, ‘and sometimes when I am sitting by the river, the running water talks to me.’

‘I should like to know what it says, if you will tell me.’

‘There are spirits everywhere,’ said Angela, solemnly ; ‘I have read it in an old book of father’s, and my soul tells me that it must be true. None but poets and young girls ever hear their voices. It is they who send inspiring thoughts and beautiful dreams. They are invisible except to the imagination, and their gentle murmurings can only be heard by the soul. They lift one up on wings—that is the real life, and the world below is only a picture. I chatter too much,’ she added, pausing abruptly. ‘If you think me foolish you must remember that no one ever encourages me to talk, and you asked me to tell you my fancies.’

‘I like to hear them,’ replied Barrington. ‘Do not hesitate to tell me your thoughts freely. You remind me of a

sister whom I loved dearly, and whose temperament was of the same quaint, poetic type as your own.'

'And she died,' said Angela, looking at him earnestly, with her hand upon the garden-gate.

'She died at fifteen.'

'A little younger than I am,' murmured Angela, thoughtfully—'only a little younger.'

She opened the gate, and without speaking further led Barrington into Mrs. Ferris's parlour. It was a homely, pretty room, shaded by a screen of grape-leaves from the western sun, with windows opening towards the east, and the walls hung profusely with drawings in chalk and water-colours. The spotless boards were covered with rugs of opossum skins; the chintz covers and muslin curtains were without speck; upon the sideboard were placed several pieces of plate, upon the brilliancy of which Mrs. Ferris prided herself.

The old lady, in her ample gown and white cap, sat at one side of the fireplace with a basket of undarned hose before her. Little Janie, perched upon a stool by her side, nursed a lapful of kittens, and gave utterance to remarks savouring somewhat of heterodoxy upon a Biblical lesson which Mrs. Ferris had been giving her.

'Aunt Pen, if God said that somebody was to kill Jesus, Judas wasn't so wicked after all for letting the Jews do it; for if he hadn't, we'd all have gone to hell.'

'Polly, Polly, mind your manners!' screeched a parrot in a cage by the window, as Angela and Barrington entered.

'Where is father?' asked the former.

'In the office settling with the fencers,' replied Mrs. Ferris; and Barrington, seeing that Angela was departing, introduced himself.

'Dear heart!' said Mrs. Ferris, 'I'm afraid that you have come over at an unlucky time. There's no one at Kooral-

byn but ourselves. Miss Longleat went to Leichardt's Town a few days ago, and the Premier is always away at this season. However, Mr. Barrington,' she added warmly, 'I am more than pleased to see you. You'll cheer up the heart of my old man, for he was just full of you when he came back from meeting you at Kooya. I don't pretend to understand geniuses, but he'll talk to you by the hour about art and books, and if you're fond of the subject you couldn't go to anyone better up in it than Anthony Ferris.'

Shortly afterwards Mr. Ferris entered with his daughter, and welcomed his guest with an old-world pomposity, in which was a savour of deprecation. The *ménage* was curious, and struck Barrington as utterly unlike any other he had seen in Australia. There was in it an odd blending of æstheticism and eccentricity, and Mrs. Ferris seemed the only commonplace element in the party. Angela's innocent garrulity appeared to have suffered a sudden check; in the presence of her stepmother she hardly spoke, but retired to a corner with her book, above which she furtively regarded Barrington.

At dusk, after a little preliminary flutter on the part of the hostess, they dined. The day had been very hot, but now a breeze stirred the vine-leaves, which cast moving shadows upon the white board. It was like a scene out of a pastoral idyl. Upon the table was a freshly-gathered dessert, and the cheer, though modest, attested the excellence of Mrs. Ferris's housekeeping.

The old man produced a bottle of his master's wine; his little dark eyes twinkled, and he stroked his grizzled beard with an air of self-complacency. Barrington had an appreciation for the picturesque, and this mixture of flourish and simplicity attracted him; his palate was gratified, and he had never felt more interested.

'To-morrow you must see Angela's studio,' said Mr.



Ferris, as after dinner they sat smoking in the verandah. 'I am convinced that you will be astonished at the talent which her drawings exhibit. She is a strange child,' he continued sadly; 'poetic to a remarkable degree, reserved with her own family, and apparently unimpressionable, but clinging to the few whom she loves with an extraordinary tenacity of affection. Here is the true artistic temperament, stirred only by the breath of sympathy. In many respects her disposition resembles mine. I pray heaven that her life may not, like mine, be embittered by disappointment and inappreciation. But I have few fears; if she lives she will become great.'

The moon was shining brightly, and Angela, in a white dress with a fantastic wreath of flowers adorning her yellow hair, seemed like a spirit of the night as she glided rather than walked in and out among the shrubs in the garden. Mrs. Ferris had withdrawn to put Janie to bed, and when a gentle snore announced that the old man had fallen asleep, Barrington quietly rose and joined the girl, who was now swinging herself to and fro in a hammock slung beneath an orange-tree.

'Is that the lagoon yonder?' asked Barrington, pointing to a shining expanse below them. 'Can we reach it from here?'

'It is at the foot of the garden,' replied the girl. 'There's a boat upon it; would you like to come out for a row?'

'I should be delighted,' he rejoined.

She sprang to the ground, and holding out her hand with a childlike gesture, led him to the bank of the lake, where a rudely-fashioned canoe was moored. She unloosed the rope and stepped in, motioning him to the seat at the stern. Then she pushed off into the middle of the lagoon, and let the boat drift while she gathered a handful of the lotus-lilies that floated on the surface of the water.

'Listen !' said Angela, presently ; ' there's music in the air to-night. Do you hear it ?'

She watched him anxiously, as, wishing to humour her, he replied in the affirmative. His sympathy was the ' Open Sesame ' to the world of her fanciful imagination ; and indeed there was above and around that faint, sweet murmuring which is the melody of a summer evening.

'The spirits are all dancing to-night,' continued Angela, looking at him with her dreamy eyes and speaking with grave simplicity. 'They always do when the moon is at its full. There's a clear place beneath a big cedar-tree by the creek, and that is their ball-room. This afternoon I brushed the twigs and fallen leaves away from the grass, so that it might be smooth and clean. All the fairies meet together, and they have a famous revel. No one knows these secrets but I.'

'And where do you learn them, Angela?'

'Now that is what puzzles me,' said the child, with a perplexed look. 'Is it when I am sleeping or waking? I do not know. It often seems to me that this is not my real home ; that my true self belongs to that spirit-world which is hidden in all the common things that surround our daily lives. That world has a language of its own which is audible in the strains of nature's music. Some are deaf and do not hear it ; others hear it but do not understand. I know—I feel—and when my stepmother says, " Poor Angel ! she is only a foolish child !" I tell myself that I am wiser than she is, and that mysteries are revealed to me which are hidden from her ; but I do not speak to Mrs. Ferris or Honoria of what is in my mind. I am silent upon these matters, which have only to do with myself.'

Angela took up the oars and began to row again, singing dreamily to herself in fantastic harmonies, which Barrington guessed to be of her own composition. She had a sweet

voice, pure and sympathetic, and, when raised, of considerable compass. Barrington leaned back in the boat, experiencing that nerve-vibration which is peculiar to temperaments of febrile excitability. The boundless expanse of shadowy solitude, the stillness of the night, the gliding motion of the boat, and the unearthly beauty of his companion, acted upon his imagination like the fumes of opium, and he felt that he was, for the hour at least, in an Eastern paradise.

Suddenly Angela ceased singing, and rested on her oars.

'I am so tired,' she said in her pathetic, childlike voice. 'I get so easily tired. Let us drift; and do you talk now. I want to listen. It is very pleasant gliding through the water like this. We will come here every night. You won't go away soon? Say that you will not go away.'

'My pretty child,' said Barrington, 'I will not talk of departure to-night. When the time comes it will be difficult to resist the charm of your sweet voice if you bid me stay.'

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## CHAPTER XII.

### ON THE LAGOON.

UPON the following morning, at Barrington's request, Angela led the way to her studio. It was a room in one of the outbuildings originally used for garnering corn, and adjoined the store and accountant's office, which constituted Mr. Ferris's peculiar domain.

The door was padlocked, and only Angela and her father possessed the keys. The window overlooked a secluded part of the garden, where roses grew in rank luxuriance and scented verbena filled the air with perfume. By an ingenious

contrivance Mr. Ferris had arranged that the light should fall from above, and had caused the glass skylight to be protected from the violent hailstorms which raged among the mountains, by slanting sheets of zinc, that softened the glare without obscuring the light.

A little book-shelf surmounted a pine cupboard in one corner, but the rest of the room was lined with pictures of all kinds, in various stages of development—sketches of grass and reeds ; of sunrise and sunset upon the mountains ; of moonlight shimmering on the lagoon ; dull anatomical studies and graceful portrayals of shadowy forms, rising from the mist or blending with the clouds. In every conception there were touches of mystery and sadness, of high effort and divine desire, which, though often imperfectly executed, were full of poetic originality. The true artistic soul revealed itself in every stroke of her pencil. Her landscapes were characterised by a delicate sentiment that lifted nature to the pitch of idealism ; her studies of the human face and form were types of spiritual beauty, with indeed the exception of a roughly-sketched portrait of a woman which at once attracted Barrington's attention.

'Who is this?' he asked eagerly, while Angela stood anxiously awaiting his comments upon her more ambitious works.

'It is Honoria Longleat !' said Angela, coldly.

'This—this Miss Longleat !' repeated Barrington, unprepared for beauty of so high an order.

He stood for a few moments in rapt contemplation of the drawing.

'Kooralbyn is a favoured place,' he murmured.

Angela turned away, her face wearing an expression of childlike pain.

'What is the matter, little one?' asked Barrington, seeing that she did not speak.

'You think only of *her*,' muttered Angela.

Barrington took her hand in his, and ranging the walls with his eyes, gave her pictures the calm inspection of a connoisseur.

'Accept my apologies for doubting you,' he said. 'You *have* genius.'

Angela's eyes sparkled with delight, and she suddenly raised a cloth which covered the painting upon her easel—a sunset study of plain and mountain.

'What do you think of the picture?' asked Mr. Ferris, entering. 'There is scope for the imagination in this conception. A little softening of that distance, Angela. A touch of mystery in the shadows of yonder valley. You have work here yet, my child.'

Barrington criticised and admired freely, but presently his eyes wandered to the portrait of Honoria. The old man observed his preoccupation, and frowned.

'Pah!' he cried in his excitable manner, 'it is ever so; while men have human instincts, the glory of art must shrink into nothingness before the potency of flesh and blood. Popular taste would prefer the portrait of a wanton to the fairest incarnation of poesy. But it is to enrich the future and not the present that the artist toils. My Angela, thy frail frame enfolds a divine mission.'

'You are right,' said Barrington. 'Here is no ordinary talent. Surely you will not delay in taking her to Italy. It would be a sin to posterity were she debarred from studying art in its highest phases.'

'My friend,' said Anthony Ferris, solemnly. 'I have carefully planned Angela's future. In forbidding that she should be coerced; in permitting her to roam about the bush as she would, and in giving free play to her fantastic imagination, I have merely followed out my theory of artistic education. The truest artist is he whose aspiration

springs direct from the heavenly fount. To produce great work, he must from infancy have become familiarised with Nature in all her moods, untrammelled by conventional rules, and at liberty to send forth shoots of fancy according to the natural bent of his mind. There is time, later on, to study the old masters—who, after all, were but interpreters—the world of cities, the drama of society. I have had a motive in confining Angela's sympathies within the circle of these mountains. She must have become an artist before the petty interests of womanhood drag down her soul.'

As her father spoke Angela's gaze turned involuntarily towards Barrington, and the two pairs of eyes met. A deep blush overspread the girl's face, and seemed to reveal the dawn of an agitating consciousness. Mr. Ferris left the studio, called away by a group of station-hands who waited without. Approaching Angela, Barrington laid one hand upon her trembling fingers, and with the other pointed to the unfinished picture.

'You will never be a great artist, Angela,' he whispered, 'till you have learned to feel like a woman.'

\* \* \* \* \*

It will have been remarked that to Hardress Barrington's temperament feminine sympathy formed an essential component of happiness. That the woman by whom it was bestowed should be beautiful and interesting followed as a matter of course. That, like Angela, she should also be original and poetic, was more than his short experience of Australian society had permitted him to hope. The young girl was to him a never-ending source of speculation; her dreamy fancies and visionary talk, which seemed to verge so closely upon frenzy; her undoubted genius; the frank abandon of her manner to him, compared with her reserve to others; her beauty, and the quaint simplicity of her life and surroundings, puzzled and attracted him. He watched

her with admiration in which was no deeper feeling, and listened to her with pleasure. Her graceful companionship appeared to him like the perfume of a wild flower pervading a picturesque solitude. She seemed a true incarnation of the spirit of these Australian wilds, which, had they been invested with European romance, would have left his sensuous æstheticism nothing to desire. Till now, these free pastures and grand mountains had, to his fancy, resembled a perfectly-moulded form, destitute of the soul which brings animal beauty into harmony with human yearnings. With Angela's society the softening and poetic element, which he had so sorely missed during the last few months, was imported into his life.

Barrington's nature was one readily impressed, but slowly moved.

His passions had been so often stimulated to feverish activity that the calm vigour of healthy affection was a state of moral being that it would have been difficult to induce ; yet there were in his heart certain pure fraternal aspirations to which Angela's frank sensibility and innocent partiality appealed strongly.

For the first time since his arrival in Australia, he ceased to experience a nauseating discontent, and was in no haste to exchange the harmonious influences of Kooralbyn for the uncongenial atmosphere of Dyraaba.

He was Angela's constant companion in her walks and rides : he hung over her while she worked in her studio ; he talked to her of Rome and Paris, of music, art, and literature, making her the confidante of his vague dissatisfaction with his lot, till she began to look upon him as a hero who had suffered cruel treatment at the world's hands.

He encouraged her fantastic prattle ; he read aloud to her as they sat together by the banks of the river, or drifted in the canoe upon the lagoon. In all this tender *camaraderie*

there was to her a bewildering charm. She lay down to sleep with a smile upon her lips, and awoke with a nameless sense of joy.

Unconsciously, both to her and to himself—for unworthy motives must not be imputed to him—he was unveiling the budding beauty of her womanhood, and transporting her to an imaginary Arcadia where each step taken in uncertainty is fraught with peril, where the eyes are deceived by a false glamour, the pulses quicken and reason becomes mute ; the ground yields unreal flowers of sentiment, and the air distils an essence subtle and intoxicating, while, alas ! the lovely landscape, appearing in the distance, fades upon approach to the falsity of mirage.

One night, when Barrington had been about ten days at Kooralbyn, he and Angela were as usual out of doors, and had strolled to the edge of the lagoon. Mr. Ferris had the day before been unexpectedly summoned to a neighbouring station upon business, and Mrs. Ferris within was calmly dozing over her book. It was a balmy, voluptuous evening, the moon was rising behind the Koorong Crag, and a faint breeze stirred the petals of the lilies, and lifted Angela's hair.

The girl was in a state of fitful excitability, alternately voluble and silent, while her vacant, rippling laugh echoed over plain and water, and startled Barrington by its shrill joyousness. She had taken the oars and had rowed into the middle of the lagoon, where they had idly drifted among the lilies. Suddenly she half rose, and made the canoe whirl round and round in fantastic circles, till, alarmed for their safety, he begged her to desist.

'Take care,' he said ; ' you will upset the boat.'

'And what then?' she cried.

'We should both fall into the water, and I should have to swim with you to the shore ; or perhaps our feet might get entangled in the weeds, and we should sink.'



'That would not matter,' replied Angela, quite gravely. 'The water-spirits would not let me drown.'

'Are you not afraid of the Bunyip, then? Cobra Ball says that he inhabits this pool.'

'He is a bogie,' said Angela. 'And nothing wicked belongs to the spirit-world.'

She recommenced her antics, and playfully threw a few drops of water in his face.

'Mischievous elf!' exclaimed Barrington, seizing her hands.

There ensued a mock struggle, in which he tried to wrest the oars from her grasp. Her pretty face, perilously near his own, offered a temptation too great to be resisted. He wound his arm round her lithe form, and kissed her lips.

Angela let the oars drop, and one of them floated away among the lilies. He felt that she trembled, and frightened at what he had done, released her. She leaned back in the boat, and covered her face with her wet hands.

'Naughty child!' he said, 'why did you provoke me to conquer you?'

He drew away the fingers which hid her eyes. All her mirth and mischief had vanished, and she looked at him with an expression of wonder and beseeching that stirred his heart with a painful emotion.

'Angela,' he said, more gravely, 'I will not kiss you again, but let us make a compact with one another. I will be your elder brother, and you shall be my sweet little sister, whom I will love dearly, and who must promise to obey me when I bid her do that which is for her good. Now, you must take my seat, and I will row you to the shore. You are pale and trembling. You have over-tired yourself in your excitement. See, you have splashed yourself, too; your thin gown is quite wet, and if you remain longer on the water you will take cold.'

He placed his hand caressingly on her shoulder, covered only by her muslin bodice, which was damp with spray and dew. Angela mutely answered his appeal by bending suddenly forward and with innocent fervour pressing her lips to his hand.

He relieved their mutual embarrassment by seeking the oar which had slipped away from her hold, and then rowed her to the bank.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

#### FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

It was announced that the Parliament of Leichardt's Land would re-open upon the 3rd of March, and Miss Longleat's departure from Kooralbyn had been originally fixed for the 1st ; but, as has been seen, she had abruptly changed her plans, and had commanded Mr. Ferris's escort to town a few days prior to Barrington's arrival on the station. Had she been aware of his intended visit, it is probable that she would have lingered in order to make his acquaintance. The prospect of a new excitement would have held forth considerable attraction for her at that moment.

Since her interview with Dyson Maddox, Honoria had felt restless and unhappy. It was certain that she had rejected him. Yet it seemed by no means equally certain that she did not love him, for no sooner had she apparently convinced herself of indifference, than his image would persistently obtrude itself as the secondary figure in sundry melodramatic situations of which fancy painted her the heroine. Poor Honoria ! Imagination presented an un-circumscribed field of action, involving every condition of

being save that of passive enjoyment. Love, fear, hate, drawing-room comedy and harrowing tragedy were all comprised in her repertoire ; but the puzzling consideration which interfered with her clear foreshadowing lay in the fact that not one of the unconscious performers who played with her upon the stage of real life, answered to the pitch of emotional energy demanded by her own high-strung temperament. A Rachel, surrounded by tenth-rate provincial tragedians, could hardly have felt more at a loss than did Honoria, whose lovers, with the solitary exception of Dyson Maddox, inspired a temporary excitement followed by a sickening reaction.

The day before she left Kooralbyn Honoria received the following letter from Maddox :

‘ The Club, Leichardt’s Town,  
‘ February 21st.

‘ MY DEAR MISS LONGLEAT,

‘ Forgive me for leaving you so abruptly the other day. You will understand better than I can explain what my feelings at the time must have been. I have thought much of what you said to me, and thank you for your frankness ; it has convinced me alike of your goodwill and your coldness. Let me say one word upon that subject, which may henceforth be considered closed. It is my earnest wish that you may love deeply some more fortunate man than myself, and that thus the rich colouring which your life lacks now may be brought into it, and make you content. For myself, I am strong enough to stand on one side and watch the course of events. It is possible that there may be hope for me in the future, but I will not suffer myself to dwell upon so sweet a dream, and it is my wish to cultivate indifference. You will hear from your father that I have accepted the appointment of Minister for Lands. I hope

that I may have acted wisely for the support of our party. My new duties will prevent me from calling frequently at the Bunyas, nor, under the present circumstances, should I wish to see you often ; but I beg that you will consider Araby at your disposal if you have no riding-horses in town at present. Pardon the suggestion, but I think that, for your father's sake, it would be well if you were in Leichardt's Town ; he is lonely without a companion.

‘Ever faithfully yours,

‘DYSON MADDOX.’

Honoriam read the letter several times, and turned it over to see if there were a line or a postscript that she had overlooked ; but there was nothing to remove the impression of abandonment which the cold, guarded sentences left on her mind. She was one of those women to whom a possession becomes sweet in proportion as its attractions are enhanced by the doubtful charm of uncertainty. Now that Maddox had apparently reconciled himself to her dismissal, she felt a strong desire to recall him. She even composed the opening words of a reply to his letter : ‘Why should the subject be closed? You have not understood me as I wished.’ . . . Then her cheeks flamed, and she tossed her head. Of course such words could not be written ; and did she not know that if she were mad enough to send them, she would regret them an hour afterwards? No, let him go ! This pale, sisterly attachment was not the love of which she had dreamed.

The last words of his note appeared to carry a veiled meaning to which she had no clue. She was in entire ignorance of the incipient flirtation with Mrs. Vallancy—to which, in fact, Dyson had alluded—and was at a loss to understand Mr. Ferris's malign chuckle when she announced that upon her father's account she wished to go to town.

'I assure you that there is no occasion to disturb yourself,' he said, in a sneering tone. 'Your father has found society which will, I am sure, amply replace your own.'

'What does he mean?' asked Honoria of Mrs. Ferris, when the old man had left the room.

'Oh, my love,' replied Aunt Pen, 'it's that gossip Dungie who has been talking. He picks up and circulates all the scandal in Kooya. The Premier is but a man, and there are brazen hussies all the world over. But you need not be afraid of a step-mother; Mrs. Vallancy has got a husband, though they say that he's not any better than he should be, either.'

Honoria elevated her eyebrows contemptuously, too proud to pursue the subject; nevertheless, she held to her determination of joining her father immediately. The mail-man had passed by, so that there was no mode of informing Mr. Longleat of the change in her plans. Embracing the idea of a surprise, she made a two days' journey from Kooralbyn, travelling by steamer from Kooya, and arriving in Leichardt's Town about five o'clock in the afternoon.

Mr. Ferris hailed a cab at the wharf, and escorted her to the Bunyas. Honoria's spirits revived at the sight of the bustle around her, and she was pleased with the appearance of the house. The oleanders in front were still in bloom, and the verandah was adorned with stands of choice ferns and calladiums. The maid who opened the door looked surprised to see her mistress, and upon being questioned said that she believed Mr. Longleat was in the garden.

'Probably you have business in town,' said Honoria haughtily, dismissing her escort. 'We shall see you at dinner, I suppose?'

Mr. Ferris refused the curt invitation, and departed to an hotel, where he might at least alleviate his sense of mortification by brandy and soda-water. Honoria entered the

drawing-room, threw off her hat and gloves, and ordered tea, with a lurking hope that chance might lead Dyson Maddox thither that afternoon.

The room had a look of late occupation. It was large and tastefully furnished, extending the width of the house, and facing at the back a trim lawn and shrubbery, shaded by a row of bamboos which separated the Premier's grounds from the Botanical Gardens. Honoria turned over the books upon the table, and with a view to her winter's campaign, began planning a new arrangement of the furniture. But this was dull work unaided, and she walked out into the garden to search for her father. The recollection of Mr. Ferris's insinuations gave bent to her suspicions; nevertheless, it occasioned a disagreeable shock to her nerves to discover Mr. Longleat seated on a bench in one of the shadiest alleys of the shrubbery, side by side with a lady whom she instantly recognised as Mrs. Vallancy. No suggestion is more repellent to a young girl's maidenly instinct than that of an equivocal love affair on the part of her father. Mrs. Vallancy and Mr. Longleat were sitting very close together, and one slender, black-gloved hand rested confidently upon the Premier's white linen coat-sleeve. The expression of his face, as it was bent in profile over his companion, sent a qualm of disgust and repugnance through Honoria's mind. A fierce jealousy seized her frame and stiffened it to the coldness of ice. She erected her crest and straitened her gait as she walked majestically across the lawn.

'Papa,' she said, in silvery, neutral tones, when she had reached within a few paces of where they sat—'Papa.'

Mrs. Vallancy was a woman whose emotions were under strict control, and beyond a slight suffusion of colour she showed no embarrassment. Mr. Longleat grew very red, and looked annoyed.

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an enunciation which contempt and anger rendered very distinct. 'I have just arrived. I made up my mind to leave Kooralbryn a few days sooner than I had at first intended, and I knew that the house would be ready. I hope that you are glad to see me, papa.'

'I am always glad to see you, my dear,' replied Longleat, recovering his composure, and ashamed of himself for having felt guilty. 'Mrs. Vallancy, I think you know my daughter.' The two ladies, who were slightly acquainted, shook hands. 'Always independent-like, and taking your own way—eh, Honie?' he added, with an awkward attempt at familiarity. 'It isn't every young woman as 'ud have the liberty to come to town when she chose. Are you quite well, my girl?' he said, scrutinising her face with anxious pride. 'Somehow you seem to me as though you weren't quite up to the mark.'

'I am very well, papa,' replied Honoria, in a chilling tone; 'only a little tired with my journey. I have ordered tea. Perhaps you will come into the drawing-room and have some,' she added, turning to Mrs. Vallancy.

'I ought to be going home,' said the latter, in her appealing way. 'Your father is so kind; I was walking in the Botanical Gardens, and he met me and persuaded me to come in and see his roses. I have been asking him to explain the great political question, and he is so good as to be interested in my partisanship, though my husband is a renegade. You must not judge either of us too harshly, Miss Longleat. It is a delightful surprise, seeing you. You are down for the winter, I suppose?'

'That depends upon the progress of affairs,' replied Honoria. 'If the Ministry is ousted we shall probably retire to the obscurity of Kooralbryn. I left Janie with Mrs. Ferris,' she added, turning to her father. 'I thought it wiser to do so, in case of our beating a sudden retreat.'

Her effort at hilarity was caused by the appearance of

Maddox in the verandah. He had called to see the Premier, and did not become aware of Honoria's presence till he had crossed the lawn.

He bowed gravely to Mrs. Vallancy, shook hands with Miss Longleat, and nodded to his colleague.

For the first time in his society an uncomfortable shyness took possession of Honoria. She hurriedly proposed that they should go within doors, and when they were in the drawing-room poured out the tea, handed cream and sugar and fruit, and talked volubly, with a little caustic flavouring to her speech, which puzzled Mrs. Vallancy, and afforded Honoria herself the zest of dramatising.

Presently Mrs. Vallancy rose, and Mr. Longleat offered to accompany her to the ferry; thus Dyson and Honoria were left alone.

'What is that woman doing here?' she asked, turning fiercely upon him, as though he were responsible for Mrs. Vallancy's presence.

'I am sorry to see that she and your father have become friends,' he answered quietly.

'You know some evil of her?' continued Honoria.

'She is in an unfortunate position; her husband is a brute, and treats her unkindly. She has the reputation of being a coquette. Men speak lightly of her, and she is avoided by nice-minded women. That is sufficient reason why you should not be allowed to drift into an intimacy with her.'

'You need not fear that I shall ever be friendly with her. I detest those eyes, at once shallow and deep, and that air of injured innocence, which is only a mask to attract pity and admiration. A woman can always read a woman. She is false to the core. I had rather be a murderess than a hypocrite to my real self. It was on her account, then—on my father's—that you advised me to come down. I am not afraid, but thank you—that was like you. I did not know

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you in your letter ; it was so cold, so . . . It would grieve me deeply if you ceased to—to be interested in me.'

'I can never cease to be interested in you,' said Maddox ; 'but it is wiser for me that I should shun you. I think that I understand you better than you do yourself,' he added, with bitterness ; 'you would like me to become your lapdog again ; you want me to be your slave, but you reject me as your lover. I cannot submit to the one position ; I will not strive for the other. A man who tries to force the affection of a woman is contemptible. Perhaps, after all, fidelity is an over-rated virtue. I want to cure myself. If you have the nobility which I fancy you possess, you will help me—or you will own that you love me, and put me out of my suspense.'

Honoria sat still, with her eyes upon the ground ; then suddenly she looked up and caught his gaze. Its very ardour quenched her dawning affection ; and his appearance was rough, his coat ill-made, and by reason of his useless arm, put on awry. Involuntarily she shook her head ; her thoughts were reflected in her face, and he read them plainly enough.

'I am not polished enough for you,' he said. 'No ; that is true ; I am not of the kind from which you will choose your husband. Good-bye, Honoria,' he said in a husky voice. 'Look to me if you need a friend, but do not expect that I shall be an acquaintance. I came thinking that your father would be alone to talk over a political matter, but it is of no great consequence, and I will not wait. Perhaps you will kindly tell him that I will call at the Treasury before the meeting of the Executive to-morrow.'

Honoria uttered a faint assent, and he left her.

When she was alone, she threw herself upon the sofa and burst into an hysterical fit of weeping.

Mr. Longleat, entering a short time later, found her sitting

in a dejected attitude by the window. She had not heard him return, and he was able to perceive the traces of tears upon her cheeks.

His heart yearned towards her, and yet he scarcely knew how to accost her—this delicate piece of human mechanism which was his own, but not of him, of which he was so proud, yet hardly dared to touch. He went up behind her and laid his large rough hand awkwardly upon her shoulder. She shrank, and turned her face away.

‘Honie, my girl,’ said Longleat, ‘I thought you looked out of sorts, as though you had been crying like——’

Honoria twitched her body petulantly, and his hand fell.

‘I am quite well,’ she answered ; ‘a little tired—that’s all.’

‘You did not use to be tired with a journey from Kooralbyn,’ continued Longleat, wounded yet persistent. ‘There’s something troubling you, my dear. It’s not your way, I know, to speak of what is in your mind. You are one of the proud, reserved sort, as I’ve liked you to be. A girl like you should keep her dignity, and not let those that are beneath her into her confidence. But I’d be sore indeed if you kept a grief from me. What’s nearer than father and daughter? And we’re that to each other ; nothing can alter it. I think it might be better for us both if we talked more openly to one another ; it ’ud be better for me. A man needs sympathy sometimes. I’ve got a queer feeling on me. I’m a bit of a fatalist. Something that’s written up above is going to happen, and I want to keep hold on you ! It seems as if—for all you’ve been to me—we had never been companions like ; there hasn’t been that confidence between us that I’d have wished. Let us stick together, Honie. Let us try to cotton with each other.’

At any other time the appeal would have touched a responsive chord, but the distasteful thought of his friendship

for Mrs. Vallancy produced a feeling of revulsion, and Honoria's dissatisfaction made her ungracious.

'I have always told you everything of importance to us both,' she said perversely, 'and there is nothing on my mind now. And you have got friends. There's Mrs. Vallancy. I did not expect to find her here to-day. I am told that you are very intimate with her.'

'Yes, I have got to know her,' replied Mr. Longleat, deliberately. 'I have got to like her. Ladies are not much in my line, but she understands me. She is soft and clever and winning, and she is not too fine to talk to a rough old man like me. And I am sorry for her. She is unhappily married. She has got a hard life, poor thing! I—I'd be glad, Honoria, if you would make friends with her, and ask her to come and see you sometimes.'

Honoria's eyes flashed in wrath.

'Mrs. Vallancy will appreciate your consolation more than she will mine,' answered the girl with a jarring laugh. 'No, I cannot be her friend. She is not a woman whom I could ever like or respect. Papa, you will not force her companionship upon me.'

'I see; women are as hard as the devil to each other,' said Longleat, bitterly. 'I'll not force anyone upon you whom you dislike; but I shall make friends with whom I please.'

He moved away from his daughter with the feeling that they had taken opposite sides, and that it behoved him to defend his own. The request which he had made had been prompted by a hardly defined instinct of right. By placing Mrs. Vallancy beneath the ægis of his daughter's friendship, he hoped to secure himself against the possibility of dishonourable intent.

Honoria's unexpected arrival in Leichardt's Town had caused a reaction from his late unwholesome excitement.

As he had walked home from the ferry he had almost succeeded in convincing himself that his attraction towards Mrs. Vallancy had arisen from a natural longing for feminine sympathy, and that having found this in the society of his daughter, he must of necessity attach less significance to the emotion which those half-stolen interviews in Mrs. Vallancy's dim drawing-room had produced in his frame.

Yet in his moments of deepest infatuation, he had not admitted the existence of guilty feeling. A man drifting towards passionate admiration of a married woman, does not readily own to an unlawful attraction. It takes the name of friendship, pity, congeniality of taste—anything but love.

'I'll do as I please,' he repeated. 'I've a right to choose my own friends, and if they don't suit you, Honie, we must keep apart. You have been educated different to me, and we don't think alike. I am not complaining of that ; it is what I meant all along. My heart has been so set on your being a lady that I would not have had you like myself. That has been my pride. I hated the aristocrats. I hated their caste prejudices ; their laws made for the rich and not for the poor ; their cant and hypocrisy ; their snivelling contempt for honest, independent men. I wanted to show them that my daughter—the daughter of a bullock-driver—could be as delicate and fine as their own. It might have been happier for me if I had let you grow up rough, like Maggie Lamb ; but whether or no, I would not change you. There's plenty of money ; spend it and make yourself happy. Buy as many gowns and trinkets as you like, and hold up your head so that everyone shall envy you. As I said before, there hasn't been much companionship between us, and perhaps it was not to be expected. It has come upon me lately, this feeling of loneliness. There's not much satisfaction, after all, in riches and power.'



'Papa,' said Honoria, in a choked voice, 'I would have been more to you if I could. You have not brought me up to take a deep interest in your occupations, or to understand your thoughts.'

'That's where it is: I wanted to make a lady of you; I wanted the whole of Leichardt's Land to say, "There's Thomas Longleat's daughter—fit to be a duchess." I have kept you apart from me on purpose. I have done it for your good and for my pleasure, and I'm not grumbling at my own work. There has always been love between us, Honoria—I'm certain of that—but where there's no confidence, love is apt to die out. It would cut me to the heart if you were to grow ashamed of my rough ways, or to go agen me——'

'Papa,' cried Honoria, 'you speak very strangely. I don't want to go against you; I am very grateful for all that you have done for me. You know that I am most anxious for your political success. I have wished to make you happy.'

'Ay, ay! I am not complaining of you,' said Longleat; 'I only said that I felt lonely-like. . . . You shook my hand off your shoulder just now. . . . If things came out agen me you would not take my rough old head and lay it there, where you could not abear my hand to rest. . . . You are a fair-weather child, and I have reared you so. It's all success that tells with you. . . . I have got a queer longing on me. A man needs more in life than only to be proud of his own. Perhaps if Janie's mother had lived I should not have felt so. She would ha' made it up to me.'

'You never mention your first wife,' said Honoria, in a stifled way. Her filial sentiment was not great; she did not remember her mother, and had a vague notion that it was better not to talk of her. Yet in some inexplicable way she resented the slight to her memory implied by Longleat's frequent allusions to her successor.

Longleat reddened consciously.

'Poor Sarah!' he muttered; 'I married her at the diggings. She wasn't my sort; she had fine ways. She had some education—she was a London girl—she. . . . There, do not talk of her. . . . You never knew her—you had best let her alone——'

'At any rate I am her daughter,' said Honoria. 'You do me an injustice,' she added hysterically, and left the room, her eyes swimming in tears.

'Honie, Honie!' Longleat called after her despairingly; but she did not return. She had her cry out in her own chamber, then stiffened herself with an air of reserve; so that when she sat down to dinner with her father she met his tentative advances with cold incomprehension, and discussed the political prospects with as much calm interest as though no tender spot had been touched in her heart.

The Premier was in an excited mood. Contrary to his usual custom, he drank several glasses of wine rapidly one after the other, scarcely eating, but talking volubly.

'The townspeople are shouting that the Government is in a bad way,' he said. 'Middleton and his party are chuckling in their sleeves; but he who laughs longest laughs most. The floods out west have kept five of our men from getting down. If they don't arrive in time, the Opposition will have a good chance of ousting us. But I mean fighting, and if stone-walling tactics will tide me over, by George I'll use them!'

Honoria asked pointed questions which showed her appreciation of the situation; yet with all her interest was mingled a half-contempt for what she considered the pettiness of the object. What did it matter, after all, whether Longleat or Middleton were in power?

'You don't seem to get the steam up,' said her father. 'You will be as excited as any of them when the House

meets. Mind you, I am not saying that we shall not be beaten this time, but I'll let you into a secret. There's another shot in my locker; I have set my heart on coming out winner. The Premier of Leichardt's Lands is a big man in the colonies now, but he will be a bigger man yet before he has done.'

He rose from the table and shook his great shoulders.

'I feel hot and out of sorts,' he said; 'I think that I will take a stroll down towards the Gardens. You will be going early to bed. Perhaps I shall turn into the club and see if Dyson Maddox is there; I fancy that he wanted to talk to me this afternoon.'

Honoria delivered the message that Dyson had left.

'Were you surprised to hear that he was Minister for Lands?'

'No,' she replied. 'He is the most likely man you could have chosen. I think you have done wisely.'

'He has a good head upon his shoulders. The time may come when he will step into my shoes. Honoria, I had counted upon your being the Premier's wife. It has been a bitter disappointment to me that you have made up your mind agen him. Perhaps you'll think different by-and-by.'

'No,' she exclaimed defiantly; 'I shall never think differently.'

The Premier looked at her wistfully, and took up his hat.

'Good-night, my dear.'

He went out and walked down the street, his white linen clothes making him a conspicuous object in the half-light. It was one of Honoria's grievances that he did not as a rule change his apparel for dinner. She watched him from the dining-room windows. As in her jealous misgivings she had thought probable, he passed the turning that led to the club, and went on towards the ferry, then was lost to sight beneath the shadow of the bamboos. The girl smiled grimly and

uneasily. She was ashamed of the suspicion, yet was half ready to believe that he was on his way to visit Mrs. Vallancy, and had the miserable conviction that her power was failing her on all sides.

In truth, when he had left the Bunyas, Longleat had no fixed bent for his footsteps. They had turned unconsciously towards the river, and, as the boat was lying at the ferry-steps, he got into it.

He was the only passenger, and the boatman Pettit was loquacious as usual.

‘It were a bad thing for folks as could not walk steady to live at Emu Point. Vallancy had had a close shave of falling in not an hour since. Not but what a ducking had been like to sober him; and Lord, how he swore at the Premier! *He* warn’t agoin’ to let him carry his railway. He’d be d——d if the Government stopped in a week after Parliament opened!’

Longleat boiled with indignation. He reflected upon a promise he had made the day before, and of a proposition which he meant to bring forward in the Cabinet on the morrow. Was this the creature for whom he was about to imperil his political reputation?

Then he pictured the drunken husband’s return, his probable ill-treatment of the beautiful, injured wife. Longleat bethought him of her words: ‘If only there were some place, ever so far north, to which he could be sent.’

Gundaroo presented obvious advantages.

The Premier loitered about the Point for half-an-hour or more, not daring to approach the Vallancys’ cottage too closely, but keeping a keen watch upon the light which flickered in the windows of the drawing-room. A friend met him, and cried:

‘Hullo, Longleat! what brings you over here?’

Longleat stammered an incoherent remark upon the heat

of the night and the pleasant breeze that always blew upon this side of the water, then, with a guilty feeling weighing upon him, retraced his steps.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE COUP D'ÉTAT.

UPON the 3rd of March the Parliament of Leichardt's Land was formally reopened. The day was cloudless, and the city wore its most gala aspect. Flags waved everywhere; they floated from the gates leading to Government House, from the steamers at anchor in the river, from the shops in King Street, and the roof of the Assembly Chambers. By eleven o'clock a great crowd had collected before the entrance to the Legislative Buildings, and groaned or cheered as the various ministers, the Oppositionists, and officials walked in.

Upon each side of the steps the Volunteers were drawn up in line, the band played, and one by one, carriages drove up and deposited their occupants, mostly ladies in bright apparel, carrying gay parasols. There was a press forward as Lady Georgina Augmering, the Governor's wife, descended from her barouche, and was ushered with becoming formality to a seat upon the *daïs*.

She was a handsome, dark-haired old lady, with an artificial smile and gracious address, who always wore fine black lace and heavy silks and brilliant diamond rings, and who had a firm belief in her sacred mission as the feminine regenerator of colonial manners.

Shortly after her arrival the band struck up 'God save the Queen,' the cannons by the river-side boomed a salute, the

cheering redoubled, and Governor Augmering, a short, rubicund individual, who liked his joke, was a *bon vivant*, and inspired no particular awe, and who upon this occasion was dressed in a tight-buttoned blue uniform and a plumed hat, was met by the President, the officials, and the members, and duly conducted to his throne.

There ensued a little buzz, during which the ladies arranged their dresses and the Governor surveyed the scene below him. The chamber was long and lofty, with a gallery extending along its sides, and was furnished with carved, morocco-covered benches, and a massive table. Upon a raised crimson-carpeted dais, at one end, sat his Excellency in state, flanked by the representatives of the naval and military elements in Leichardt's Land. A few steps below him was Lady Georgina, smiling blandly around; and on a level with her the Chief Justice and the President of the Council in their robes. Dyson Maddox, in his capacity of Minister of the Upper House, occupied a seat at the head of the peeresses' benches, filled with well-dressed ladies, among whom Miss Longleat and Mrs. Vallancy were notably conspicuous.

The Premier's daughter was all in white, and wore a bouquet of rare lilies at her bosom. Mrs. Vallancy, in black, with artistic touches of yellow here and there, and a Maréchal Niel rose pinned into the lace at her neck, cast rapid glances in the direction of the bar, where the members of the Lower House would presently appear.

The message was sent; the speech read; the Railway and Loan Bill commented upon; the policy of the Government expounded. Then the flutter recommenced; the Governor left the House; the ladies smiled and nodded; and the opening scene of the political drama was over. It was a farcical performance, but it involved important issues for the Premier and his party.

The four missing members, who represented the Government majority, had not arrived.

Miss Longleat was pale, and appeared agitated. A golden serpent which she wore coiled round her neck rose and fell with the undulations of her breath. She resolutely looked away from Dyson, who sat almost opposite her. Lady Georgina Augmering addressed her kindly, and held her hand in token of affectionate welcome. The Premier's daughter was a favourite with the viceregal party, but Mrs. Vallancy's timid bow met with a chill reception.

Mr. Middleton, the leader of the Opposition, a lean, wiry man, with a bleared eye and saturnine countenance, came up and shook hands with her. He looked disagreeably triumphant. Longleat appeared dogged and flushed; Mrs. Vallancy met his eye, and gave him a smile of understanding.

'He will accept,' she whispered breathlessly, when chance threw them for a moment together. 'Oh, how can I thank you?'

'There is no need to thank me,' he returned in a low tone. 'I have done it for you.'

An interesting debate was expected. That afternoon Honoria took her place in the Ladies' Gallery of the Assembly Chamber. Mrs. Vallancy was there also, but the women did not speak to each other. Honoria was haughty and white from repressed excitement; Mrs. Vallancy looked nervous and elated.

Certain formal routine business was gone through, and an address of congratulation upon a recent felicitous Royal event was moved by a member of the Government, and after some sparring, which sufficiently betrayed the belligerent tendencies of the Opposition, finally carried. The answering address to the Governor's speech was brought forward by a bearded squatter, whose powers of oratory had been hitherto

exercised in haranguing his shearers, and who, wandering in a circle round the central point of his discourse, viz., that the late tin discoveries had been highly conducive to the prosperity of the colony, and that the time for railway extension had now arrived, and taking a generally optimistic view of the position, announced that the proposals of the Government were in all respects satisfactory to the Legislative Assembly—(cries of 'No—no!' from the Opposition benches)—adding, that he had not the least doubt of the benefit which would accrue to the colony from the formation of a railway between Leichardt's Town and Kooya, and the opening up of easy communication—

'With the Premier's station,' sarcastically interrupted a member of the Opposition. Whereupon there was a call to order, upon which another member got upon his legs, and there ensued a wordy and irregular combat, in the course of which the member for East Warra Warra denounced the member for North Carramburra as an obstructive monomaniac, who had so bullied and browbeaten the Chairman of the Commission which had been called to inquire into the expediency of a railway, that the result of the Commission had been most unsatisfactory. In fact, the honourable member for North Carramburra had shown a dishonourable desire to *burke* the whole proceedings of the Commission.

The honourable member for North Carramburra, hotly :

'Mr. Speaker, is the term *burke* Parliamentary?'

'It is the name of a man—a murderer,' rejoined an occupant of the cross-benches.

The member for North Carramburra :

'Mr. Speaker, I must state emphatically that what the honourable member for East Warra Warra alleges against me is a base fabrication.'

Further cries of 'Order.'

The Speaker expressed his opinion that it would be wise



if honourable members would avoid personal allusions, and that it might also be well to allow the honourable member to proceed, and to answer him afterwards.

Here was raised the question of privilege, and there ensued a somewhat disorderly expression of opinion on the part of the brow-beaten member, which was sufficiently uninteresting to the gallery, but which was followed by a vigorous onslaught on the part of the leader of the Opposition, who moved as an amendment, 'That the proposals of the Government in connection with public works are eminently unsatisfactory to this House'—a motion tantamount to withdrawal of confidence.

The Government tactics consisted in talking against time: the young recruits skirmishing lightly, the great-guns reserving themselves for heavier work—in the hope that the laggard reinforcements might shortly appear, while the Opposition was eager to hurry matters to a crisis, and provoke a division that must result in Ministerial defeat.

In the gallery, the wives of the Anti-Railwayist Faction were decorously triumphant: the ladies on the Government side looked crestfallen and mutually sympathetic; yet each hugged the comforting reflection that her lord might assist in a coalition Ministry. To Miss Longleat alone the defeat would be absolutely crushing.

She was sitting apart at the lower end of the gallery, while two Government clerks, upon the other side of the partition, were discussing the situation, unaware that their remarks reached her ears. Said one:

'It is likely that there will be an appeal to the country.'

'Very improbable,' returned the other. 'Longleat must put on considerable pressure to induce the Governor to sanction it. Old Augmering's time is nearly up, and he is in mortal terror of doing anything unconstitutional.'

'Longleat has the pluck of the devil,' was the reply.

'Whatever comes of the debate, I'll back him to win in the long-run. I can tell by the very expression of his face that he has a charge in reserve. Depend upon it, Parliament will be dissolved. Have you seen the evening's *Gazette*? This Gundaroo appointment will go against him. It looks like a bribe—yet the fellow is not worth buying. What can have induced him to give it to Vallancy?'

The other shrugged his shoulders.

'There's a woman at the bottom of it. It is convenient sometimes to get a husband out of the way.'

Presently Dyson Maddox, whose operations in the Council had been short, came in to hear the debate, and gained admittance to the Ladies' Gallery. He had watched Honoria's face with its expression of pained perplexity till he could not resist coming to her. It seemed to him that she had cast upon him a look of dumb appeal, and he obeyed the summons and took his seat beside her.

'I hear,' she said, hoarsely, 'that the police magistracy of Gundaroo has been given to Mr. Vallancy. Is it true?'

'It is in the evening's *Gazette*,' replied Dyson.

'Why have you allowed this?' cried Honoria, passionately. 'You are in the Ministry; surely you had a voice in the matter?'

'I am truly sorry,' replied Dyson. 'You must know that it was done in opposition to my wishes. Your father made it a personal question. But I ought not to discuss Cabinet matters even with you.'

'The appointment will tell fearfully against you,' exclaimed Honoria.

'Undoubtedly. Middleton will handle it presently. We are prepared for unpleasant language.'

'Oh, I am sick of this!' cried Honoria. 'They say that he has done it for *her* sake. It is hateful—degrading. . . . I will go back to Kooralbyn,' she added suddenly. 'We

shall be beaten ; why should I stay ? Papa said the other day that I was a fair-weather child ; I will justify his opinion. He has forsaken me. Let him stay with Mrs. Vallancy. I will return to Janie. . . . And now I am going home.'

Dyson was touched with deep pity for her evident dependency. His very compassion forced him to place a restraint upon his speech, and made him appear cold. He escorted her to the Bunyas, but refused her timidly-given invitation to enter. She ate her dinner alone ; then returned to the House, and sat listening to the speeches till midnight.

The galleries were now fuller than ever. Opposite her the mob jostled each other ; and the Speaker's anteroom was crowded with gentlemen, who watched her eagerly as she took her place behind the railings, not so high but that her face could be plainly seen. Beneath her, at the head of the Ministerial bench, her father sat, his arms folded, his eyes downcast, his face sullen. Dyson was now sitting below the bar. The interest had become intense. There were no loungers strolling in from the smoking and refreshment rooms. The Sergeant-at-Arms looked more alert than usual. The Speaker leaned forward over his desk and listened excitedly. Yet the subject-matter of the debate was of no State importance.

The leader of the Opposition was still speaking. The Gundaroo appointment was commented upon in terms far from complimentary to the Premier. An undercurrent of disgraceful insinuation ran through the discussion. Honoria's cheeks burned, and Mrs. Vallancy was rigid, braving shame to avoid suspense. Longleat sat still, with a look of dogged obstinacy upon his face, and did not raise his head till a direct charge was levelled against his honour, when he got up and fiercely denied the allegation against him.

There followed a copious interchange of personalities, and Honoria blushed deeper. Why did her father descend to such scurrility? This petty warfare was degrading him. There was about the Premier to-night none of that rugged eloquence and manly determination which had compelled her approval, even when she had winced at the misapplication of an aspirate.

Mr. Middleton stood with outstretched finger pointed towards the object of his attack, pouring forth a torrent of invective, which was enhanced in disagreeable reference by the gestures with which it was accompanied. He could descend to any vituperation which did not exceed the limits of Parliamentary language. There were cries of 'Order, order,' but still the rush of eloquence suffered no check. He knew his adversary's weak point, and would not let his advantage slip. 'What had been the honourable member's meaning when he had declared upon the boards of that House that he had never given away a billet from personal or interested motives? How could he justify to his colleagues and his antagonists this perversion of his oft-vaunted political morality?' etc., etc.

At last Honoria felt that she could bear no more. She went home and dreamed miserably of defeat; but the debate continued all night, and grey morning crept in upon the combatants as they nodded upon their benches, or took it by turns to retire for rest and refreshment, always careful to preserve a quorum.

Except from her point of observation in the Ladies' Gallery, Honoria saw nothing of her father for the next three days. He fought bravely when his turn came, shaking himself like a lion, and speaking till exhaustion compelled him to cease, even drawing one convert to the Government side by the rough oratory that seldom entirely failed its mark. But the Ministry was doomed.

Upon the third night the debate was brought to a conclusion. The House divided, sixteen to thirteen, and the Opposition carried the amendment by a majority of three.

It was confidently expected that the *Gazette* extraordinary would announce the resignation of the Ministry.

There were public meetings of both factions. A violent demonstration took place in the Premier's favour, and a counter-procession of Anti-Railwayists solemnly burned his effigy before his own windows. There were conferences of the Cabinet, and rushings to and fro between the public offices and Government House. A few days later the *Gazette* announced 'That his Excellency the Governor, with the advice of his Executive Council, would be pleased to prorogue the Parliament of Leichardt's Land, now assembled prior to its dissolution.'

A sudden blankness fell upon the capital. The late members rushed back to their constituencies to canvass for the new election; and Honoria, oppressed by a strange weariness and indifference, returned to Kooralbyn.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE DRYAD OF THE TI-TREE.

Down by the creek, deep in the umbrageous shadow of fern and cedar, Barrington first saw Honoria.

He was driving over from Dyraaba alone, and was skirting the river-bank in the half-admitted hope of meeting Angela. He was not aware that Miss Longleat had returned from Leichardt's Town, and it was with joyful surprise that he recognised in a secluded bend of the creek, a little below the crossing, the original of Angela's sketch.

Honorina was sitting upon the horizontal branch of a ti-tree, her back resting against the trunk, her feet almost touching the water, as it glided over a bed of stones, its melodious murmuring deafening the sound of voice or foot-fall, into a deep pool hemmed in by ferny banks. A book lay upon her lap, a cluster of the crimson bottle-brush flowers of the ti-tree swayed above her head, a sunbeam striking upon the coils of her hair made them look like ropes of reddish-gold; the quivering leaves cast delicate shadows upon her white-clad shoulders and round, white throat, and the water gurgled against one smooth arm, which, with its muslin sleeve rolled carelessly above the elbow, drooped lightly into the stream, and made a resistance to the shallow current. A kangaroo-hound, lying on the ground beside her, barked loudly at the sight of a stranger.

'Quiet, Durra,' exclaimed Honorina, as she lifted her full eyes from her book—a yellow-backed tome from the select library of fiction—and turned them aimlessly upon the opposite bank. But an intervening log, with fresh sprouts forming a natural hedge above its naked trunk, hid Barrington from her view. She resumed her reading for a few moments, then threw down the volume and said aloud:

'Starch, sentiment, and twaddle. It is like a seidlitz powder flavoured with sugar. Oh, how tired I am of these novels! Come, Durra, we had better go home. What is the matter with you now?'

Honorina rose, and looking straight across the creek, met Barrington's gaze of critical admiration.

She coloured slightly, and bowed, not at all puzzled as to his identity. She had heard him described by the Ferrises: Aunt Penelope in especial had been eloquent in her raptures, and, making allowance for slight hyperbole, Honorina was obliged to confess that she had painted him

with tolerable accuracy. Here was a promising opening for a drama, in which the hero would undoubtedly possess the outward essential attributes of his position, and might readily be classed above that social and intellectual standard implied by the term 'interesting.'

Barrington crossed the little strip of water which separated them, and, hat in hand, dismounted and approached Miss Longleat. Honoria looked at him with her wide-open eyes, their expression combining the innocence of a child with the fearlessness of an animal. The dog still barked loudly.

'Be quiet, Durra!' said she again, laying her shapely fingers upon its neck.

Barrington was keenly sensible to harmony of circumstance and surroundings. This divine creature appeared to advantage against a background of foliage and plain. Her beauty, viewed under present conditions, excited a far more warm emotion than it could have aroused had he made her acquaintance in a European or Australian ball-room. He was a worshipper of female loveliness, but clearly this Dryad of the ti-tree represented no type with which he had as yet come into contact. The region might be classical, and he a new Arcas.

'I beg your pardon for disturbing you,' he said. 'I believe that the regular crossing-place is higher up the river, but I am not yet bushman enough to be able to make landmarks of ridges and gullies. Lady Dolph Bassett advised me to follow the water-course. I think that I have the honour of speaking to Miss Longleat?'

Honoria signified assent.

'I had the pleasure of staying for a fortnight at Kooralbyn some little time ago,' continued Barrington. 'I regretted much that both you and your father were in Leichardt's Town. I felt a wish to make myself known to Mr. Longleat, and my friend Lord Dolph Bassett, who is better

acquainted with Australian customs than I, who am a stranger, assured me that I should be welcome a second time. May I introduce myself? My name is Barrington.'

Honorina bowed and smiled. Barrington's impression of her manner was that it blended in a curious degree dignity and seductiveness.

'Lord Dolph's friends are always welcome,' she said, 'and we are glad to see you for your own sake. Mrs. Ferris has told me of you. I have not been long at Kooralbyn. My father is unfortunately still in town, but Aunt Penelope will be charmed. I am just going to walk home. The house is no distance from here, and if you like I will show you the way. Come, Durra.'

'You have dropped your book,' said Barrington, picking up the yellow-backed volume she had been reading. 'I am not surprised that you choose the river-bed for your study. I am in love with the beauty of Australian creeks. When I last came over from Dyraaba, I met Miss Ferris at the crossing, and she too was carrying a book.'

'Oh, Angela sits dreaming over poetry for hours. I only read because it is less tedious than contemplating the gum-trees. As for that stupid story, pray do not trouble yourself about it; it is of very little consequence what becomes of it. A stockman might have found it, and it would certainly have amused him more than it has amused me. Novels are all alike; they are false and unnatural. I like plays better. They, at any rate, are real as far as they go.'

'I am surprised that you, a colonial, should complain of the artificiality of existence,' said Barrington, after a short pause, during which they had clambered up the bank and gained the plain. 'Australian life strikes me as being so very realistic. I should not have imagined that you would be *blasée*.'

'Do not call me a *colonial*,' said Honorina, with pretty



petulance. 'When you have lived longer in Australia you will know that you could not pay a young lady a worse compliment.'

'I accept the rebuke,' said Barrington, laughing, 'though I don't in the least know how I have deserved it.'

'To be *colonial* is to talk Australian slang; to be badly dressed, vulgar, everything that is abominable,' replied Honoria with grave simplicity; at least that is the general opinion. I have seen Englishwomen who talked slang, only in a different way; nevertheless we all tried to imitate them, just as we copy Paris models for our gowns. You will see that it is the fashion out here to be as British as possible. Our loyalty ought to flatter your national vanity. You have lately come from England, have you not?'

'Yes,' replied Barrington. 'In technical language I am a *new chum*.'

'And do you relish what you call the realism of Australia?'

'It is hardly fair to catechise me, when as yet I have seen no part of the colony but the Koorong district.'

'Do you like it so far? Do you find the people better or worse than you expected? You have been staying at Dyraaba. How do you like Lady Dolph Bassett? She is a fair specimen, I suppose, of an Australian, as she has never been out of Leichardt's Land in her life.'

'I imagine that one likes or dislikes a woman in proportion to the amount of interest she excites in one's mind,' answered Barrington. 'Lady Dolph does not affect me in the least.'

Honoria uttered a little laugh. 'It seems to me,' she said, 'that everybody and everything might be classed under two headings, that which interests and that which bores. The fault which I have to find with persons in general is that they don't stimulate my curiosity. I am perpetually

trying to make believe that I am amused and cannot succeed.'

'You are easily bored, then?'

Honorina approved of his air of repressed inquiry, which conveyed a veiled complimentary reference to her own particular disposition.

'I am afraid that I don't know enough of the world to define boredom. I am always fancying that we Australians are like children playing at being grown-up. It is in Europe that people live——' She paused abruptly. Barrington smiled.

'I thought so when I first left it; I do not now.'

'Australia is less odious, then, than you imagined?'

'Australia is delightful. There is a thoroughness about it which pleases me immensely. A few refining touches, and there would be nothing to desire. All that is lacking are traditional influences, and they will come in time.'

'But, do you not see?—everything with us is borrowed. We cannot be original—we cannot even set up an independent government. We must copy old-world forms, and we have nothing of what makes the charm of the old world. Our range of view is so limited. We are so ignorant of life, and ignorant people cannot put out feelers, either deeply or widely.'

'I think that you do yourself injustice as a representative of young Australia,' said Barrington. 'The very longing for experience implies a large capacity for sensation. I feel sure that is your case.'

Honorina looked at him eagerly. She was longing to hear further analysis of herself, but was too proud to put a leading question or remark to one so nearly a stranger. Barrington saw that he had made an impression, and wisely left it to deepen. They had reached the slip-rails; he let them down, and they walked towards the house almost without speaking.

Upon the fence the purple passion fruit were still hanging. Mrs. Ferris poked her becaped head from the window of her cottage, and bestowed a warm welcome upon her guest. She could not speak too highly of Mr. Barrington. Janie ran out and clung to Honoria's skirts, and Angela, who had been sitting in one of the squatter's chairs in the verandah, gazing dreamily towards the mountain, approached and, with a joyful smile, gave him her hand.

Who can tell in what subtle harmonies the inner chords of maidenly consciousness first vibrate at the touch of love?

Since Barrington's departure from Kooralbyn, waking or sleeping, the thought of him had been ever present in Angela's mind. A dreamy sense of happiness seemed like an odour to pervade life. Nature and Art spoke to her in new tones. Poetry was no longer mere passionless elevation of the soul. Music appealed to a deep-seated longing. The clouds kissing the mountains, the breeze stirring the leaves, the flowers bending towards each other on the plain, awakened thrills of sweet comprehension. The world contained a new element—that of love. Yet though she felt the influence of this dreamy languor, half pleasurable, half painful, she did not attribute it to its rightful source, and greeted the Englishman with all the frankness of innocent maidenhood.

Mr. Ferris was seated in the parlour, in absorbed contemplation of a rural scene in water-colours, which he had propped upon a table before him.

'This is my little hour of recreation, after a day devoted to unlovely detail,' he said, shaking hands with Mr. Barrington. 'I am glad that *you* have arrived at this moment, to see my little gem in so perfect a light. There is atmosphere for you; you breathe it—it encompasses you. A hay-field—but what a hay-field! You sniff the dry grass—the breeze bears the scent to your nostrils. It is English—it is rural—it is idyllic—it has such a nice feeling.'

Barrington, looking over the old man's shoulder, was more interested in observing the effect of a sunbeam that shone through the grape-leaves with which the verandah was tapers-tried, and cast a reddish glow upon Miss Longleat's head and face, deepening the shadows of brow and eyelash, and blending her colouring into a richness of tint that reminded him of one of Raffaele's Madonnas. Even Mr. Ferris, glancing up suddenly, regarded her with a purely artistic admiration, which changed into snarling depreciation as she passed disdainfully into the garden.

'You see how she despises me,' he whispered angrily; 'she does not even fling at me as many words as she bestows upon her dog. What am I in her estimation? Nothing but the fawning dependent of her rich father. Well, the time may come. . . . We shall see—we shall see—'

Mr. Ferris continued for a few moments to mutter wrathful but inaudible words as he stooped over his picture, then relapsed into a fit of morose silence, and Barrington walked out into the garden, attracted by the flutter of muslin drapery beneath the orange-trees where the two girls, with Janie, were sitting.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### BARRINGTON AND HONORIA.

HONORIA was mutely wondering when an opportunity would occur for approaching the subject of her idiosyncrasies, upon which Barrington had so lightly touched. The Englishman had impressed her fancy. After all, had Dyson Maddox but known the fact, it needed nothing so very heroic in quality to enchain her interest—only a refined address, the prestige of aristocratic connections, a dexterous knack of

handling commonplace, and a persistent gaze which should be far removed from impertinent admiration. As Barrington stepped from the verandah towards her, she was ready to acknowledge that he was the most distinguished-looking person she had ever met.

Janie was entreating Angela to tell her a story. The child despised her sister's nursery tales, which invariably dealt with Cockamaroo, Mother Bunch, and such-like commonplace bogies; but Angela had a delicious repertoire of fairy lore. There was a dim region beyond the Koorong Crag, mysterious now in the gathering twilight, which was the Paradise of water-witches and flower-elves, where dwelt the praying-mantis, the high-priest of the plain; the souls of black piccaninies, which had attained the dignity of storm-spirits, and such-like mythic creatures which furnished food for Angela's vivid imagination.

While the child listened wonder-eyed, Honoria moved a few paces apart, and Barrington, joining her, asked her the names of two peaks which rose on the horizon.

They conversed smoothly upon generalities for a little while, discussed the scenery, the climate, the social characteristics of the Koorong, the habits of the Aborigines, the signification of native words. Whilst he talked Honoria abstractedly twisted round her fingers a serpent bracelet that she wore upon her wrist; it suddenly snapped and fell to the ground.

Barrington gathered up the links and placed them in her hand.

'Talking of the blacks' language,' he said, looking at the ruby-scaled head with its diamond eyes, 'are your ornaments emblematic? I am told that Kooralbyn means "the abode of serpents."'

'*Kooralbong* is literally, I believe, "dead serpents,"' answered Honoria, carelessly. 'I rather like the connec-

tion of ideas ; there is something weird and uncanny in it.'

Barrington looked at her fixedly, and repeated—

'Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire,  
Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar.'

She coloured slightly.

'Oh, everyone who reads, or pretends to read Keats, quotes "Lamia" to me. But I had rather you did not add to the number. I am sure that you cannot wish to be commonplace.'

'There is a certain hackneyed phase of admiration which when applied to a particular object ceases to be commonplace,' replied Barrington, gallantly.

Honoria laughed consciously, but she hesitated to meet his eyes ; they affected her strangely. Suddenly she looked boldly up and began :

'You said something about me this afternoon—about my character—which made me think that perhaps you understood me.'

'You see,' said Barrington, 'that to be interesting involves the penalty of being sometimes the subject of speculation.'

'I should not dislike being studied if——'

Honoria left her sentence unfinished.

'If you could be shown the cause of your vague dissatisfaction. Your life is faintly inharmonious, and you are conscious of a want which you can hardly express.'

'Do you know why I am discontented?' said Honoria, dreamily. 'It is strange, I——' she lifted her head, and said with an effort at gaiety, 'When I know you better I shall ask you to tell me the reason. It would be hardly fair to put you to the test so soon.'

'I am ready to answer it,' replied Barrington.

Honorina turned and rejoined Angela.

'But what for did the storm-spirits *drown* the poor butterfly?' cried little Janie, the tears running down her cheeks. 'I'll never be sorry no more for the black piccaninies that die. Little mother, I think your stories are best after all.'

'Tell me, Janie,' said Barrington, 'why do you call your sister Little Mother.'

'My mamma is in heaven,' announced Janie, gravely. 'She is big now that she has got wings—ever so much bigger than she used to be. You shouldn't talk—you should attend. Angela tells nice stories when they end well—and some things is true, ain't they?' added Janie, reflectively.

At that moment a bell ringing within, summoned them to dress for dinner. Barrington stood watching Honorina as she led Janie to the house, then turned to Angela, who had lingered to gather a flower.

'My little friend,' he said affectionately, 'you look paler than when I was here before. Are you quite well? Will you row me on the lagoon this evening?'

Angela shook her head.

'I must go on the water no more at night; it has made me ill. Mrs. Ferris says that I must stay within. I should not have minded her, but my father has forbidden me also.'

'Ill!' he repeated. 'Indeed! I am sorry for that. What is the matter?'

'Oh, it is nothing. I am tired, that is all. I have a cough, and my appetite is gone, and I sleep badly. But,' she added, 'what difference does it make whether one is waking or sleeping, if one has pleasant dreams, and those the fairies always send me. Tell me,' she said, taking his hand, and looking earnestly into his face, 'shall you love me less now that Honorina has come?'

'Jealous little puss!' he replied, pressing her hand. 'I

shall always love you. Have we not made a compact that you are to be my little sister ?

She did not answer, but regarded him wistfully for a moment, then gave him a little bouquet that she had arranged, and went into the house.

During the evening Barrington observed that Angela was certainly paler, and much more silent and dreamy than during his last visit. The presence of Miss Longleat seemed to exercise a withering effect upon her bursts of innocent gaiety. She resembled a flower which expands only in certain favoured spots. Sympathy of a subtle kind was necessary to her happiness, and from her father alone did she appear to receive it. Mrs. Ferris's affections were principally engrossed by Honoria, and she had no deeper feeling than generally diffusive benevolence to bestow upon her step-daughter. The old man watched his darling anxiously.

'She caught a chill upon the lagoon, and has been ailing ever since you left,' he remarked to Barrington. 'She is a delicate flower, and needs the tenderest care.'

It was not thought prudent that Angela should expose herself to the night breeze, and, after dinner, instead of joining his guest with a cigar, Mr. Ferris remained within doors, and devoted himself to his daughter's amusement. Honoria, as was her wont, passed out to the garden, where, upon the pretext of smoking, Barrington presently joined her.

'Do you object to my cigar ?' he asked.

'No,' she returned, 'it has a nicer scent than those to which I am accustomed. I am fortunate in not being required to tolerate the store tobacco. Is it true that English ladies smoke cigarettes ?'

'Certainly ; would you like to try one now ?'

'No, thank you ; we have not yet learned to imitate them in that respect, and I do not know how far I may safely take



you as my guide. I don't think that Mr. Trollope's heroines smoke, and I am always told that they are patterns of English young ladies. You see we Australians are under a great disadvantage, and it is rather difficult for us to decide between the morals of Mr. Trollope and Ouida.'

Barrington laughed. He began to think that Miss Longleat had not much to learn.

They strolled down beneath the vine trellises, Honoria pausing every now and then to brush a rose with her lips, or to pluck a blossom from above her head. He was bewitched by the beauty of her figure as she lifted her arms. She plucked some strawberry guavas, and handed him a few of the red berries upon a leaf.

'Come,' she said, 'let us eat our dessert by the lagoon.'

'With all my heart,' said Barrington; 'it would be a sin to spend such an evening as this within doors.'

They walked to the lake and sat down beneath a mulberry-tree that grew upon the bank.

'If there were only a moon one could see the distant mountains distinctly,' said Honoria. 'How still and solemn it is!' she waved her hand towards the wide plain with its bosky border and dim background. 'You can have nothing like this in Europe.'

Barrington relit his cigar, and puffed for a few moments in silence. The night-sounds deepened his sense of novelty. Every now and then there was a whinnying call from one horse to another; the melancholy cries of the curlew and morepork, alternated with the gurgling note of the swamp-pheasant. Save their own voices, there was no human utterance—the shadowy solitude seemed infinite.

The surface of the lagoon brokenly reflected the stars overhead. Sirius shone resplendent; and the Southern Cross dipped majestically behind the Koorong Crag.

'You must be very fond of this place,' said Barrington.

'I have not lived here much. I was educated in Sydney. Since I left school, I have only passed a few months of each year at Kooralbyn. I should not be here now had not the session ended so suddenly.'

'You take a great interest in politics?'

'I play at taking an interest in politics, because there is nothing else to make my life exciting. And then, as you know, my father is the Premier. Naturally, I am a part of his success or failure. But sometimes I am ashamed of my eagerness . . . I thought the whole thing farcical the other day when Parliament was opened. It never struck me in quite the same light before. I was horrified to think that I knew no better. . . . You must feel as I do. You must look upon our statesmen as marionette figures dancing to a set tune—isn't it so?'

Barrington laughed softly.

'*You* despise what is familiar. To me, life here has all the charm of novelty.'

'Yes, that is true; but it does not give me any comfort. Most people with cramped experience have no wish to enlarge their sphere of thought and action. I try to believe that I am unlike the rest of the world—our world. I dream that I shall be this or that in the future. I plan even for the morrow. I picture an existence in which I shall feel exquisite bliss, or keen pain—I do not much care which—anything but vegetation.'

She threw her head back, and clasping her hands behind it, looked at him with bright, excited eyes.

'The poetic temperament has always an infusion of dissatisfaction,' said Barrington. 'You are tormented by an inward craving, which will give you no rest till it is appeased.'

'What must I do? I do not care much about the things I know, or the people with whom I am thrown. I want

something altogether new—I cannot endure to go continually over the same ground. Tell me how I can make myself contented.’

‘You must *love*,’ said Barrington, deliberately.

Honorias eyes sank before his steady gaze, levelled from underneath his straight brows, and charged with communicable fire. She was half repelled, half fascinated, and shrank back against the tree.

‘Don’t,’ she cried, ‘don’t look at me so. . . . It—it makes me afraid.’ Then she shook herself together and laughed, as though ashamed of her involuntary confession of weakness. ‘You must not think that I mean everything that I say. I am a person of impulses. Sometimes I have an impulse to like ; sometimes to detest. You recommend me to fall in love—to marry. Do you not think that you may be condemning me to a lifelong imprisonment within a narrow circle of domestic interests.’

‘Why must married life be necessarily vapid, and domesticity commonplace? Why not rather an effective background for drama, in which the performers need not be limited to two? I am convinced that to make the most of life one must cultivate many-sidedness—feel with the emotive—see with the spiritual—analyse with the critical—glide rapidly from one sensation to the other—dipping, as it were, into every nature with which one is brought into contact, and extracting a grain of enjoyment from each. To gain this end one must have no strong individual aspirations, no special idiosyncrasy except a keen susceptibility. One’s own destiny must be decided . . . and yours is still doubtful. Every woman is restless till she has probed the mysteries of womanhood.’

‘Perhaps you are right,’ said Honorias. ‘I will think over your advice. You must have seen a great deal of the world and of the pleasant things in it. I am surprised that you

should have wished to come out to Australia. Perhaps you don't intend to remain here.'

'On the contrary, I have every intention of going through my course of *colonial experience*. There is one crime that is never pardoned in England, Miss Longleat.'

'What is that?'

'Poverty.'

'But I have heard . . . your brother is—is rich, is he not?' asked Honoria, naïvely.

'He would tell you that for his position he is a pauper. That has nothing to do with me. I suppose I ought to confess that I have run through a younger son's fortune. But a man must float with the tide in England. To catch far-off glimpses of my old life would have been to suffer the tortures of Dives. So I have brought my modest competency to Australia, in the flattering hope that I may double it.'

'Wealth is not of much account out here. Everyone works. A great many people are poor. I see there are advantages in a free country.'

'So my mother thought,' said Barrington. There was a tinge of bitterness in his tone, which Honoria perceived.

'Your mother is in England,' she said softly. 'I like hearing of other women—of English women especially. Do you mind talking of her? Will you tell me what she is like?'

'She is *très grande dame* of a type you do not know, for it does not exist in Australia. Her fetish is the family glory—her hero the eldest son. She is a rigid conventionalist, but you would never find it out, for she is soft as velvet. She dresses beautifully, her face is like that of a Greek statue. She is passive in manner, yet her influence has the most extraordinary power upon everyone with whom she comes into contact.'

'And is there anyone else? Have you any more ladies belonging to you?'

‘There is my sister-in-law, Lady Barrington. She is a London beauty, but piques herself upon being a devoted wife and mother. She talks the shibboleth of the great world : hunts after royalty, and might be sympathetic if she were not so brainless. Then there are half a score of cousins, none of whom would be the least interesting to you.’ He glided on to commonplace topics ; talked of Paris and London, of Scotch scenery, and trips to Norway ; described Castle Barrington, as it lay among the Yorkshire moors, and, in a well-bred unostentatious manner, made apparent his claims to social distinction.

Honorias egoistic temperament rarely permitted her to feel deeply interested in any conversation of which she was not directly or indirectly the subject, but to-night she forgot to speculate upon the impression she was making, so powerfully was her own fancy aroused. Yet there was something faintly uncomfortable in the effect which his long looks produced upon her nerves. She felt tremulously excited and uncertain of herself. At last she rose discomposedly and proposed that they should return within doors and persuade Angela to sing to them.

Barrington slept in a little white-curtained chamber in the Ferris’s cottage. A white lily in a vase upon the dressing-table conjured up visions of the lagoon. He guessed that Angela had placed it there. The night seemed long. His slumber was broken, and he had vivid dreams. In the morning he awoke with an excited sense of pleasure at the thought of prosecuting a new experience. Although he was well aware of his extreme susceptibility to feminine attractions, he was yet surprised to find what a strong impression Honorias had made upon his imagination. ‘She belongs to a new type,’ he said to himself, as he dressed. ‘I must study her.’

He had ample opportunity for so doing during the next

few days, spent in lounging about the garden, in picturesque walks by the river-banks, in *lôte-à-lôte* rides and long desultory conversations. Under such conditions attraction might be expected to ripen rapidly into intimacy.

Honoria appeared to him to be a mass of contradictions. One half of her nature was poetic, the other material. She was frank to boldness, and ignorant without giving the impression of innocence, so that he could not satisfy himself where her knowledge of the world began and where it ended. Often he thought her ardent—occasionally cold. All that he felt certain of was that she had an intense curiosity in all matters of sensation, and he was determined to see how far it would lead her.

Underlying his speculations there was the distinct understanding that she was a prize, which, could he but win it, would enable him to remodel his career to his complete satisfaction. As Honoria Longleat's husband, life would be no longer barren. But she was just the sort of woman upon whom it was impossible to calculate with any degree of certainty. The spontaneity of her nature gave her continually new starting-points. The very interest which he was confident of having inspired might by a momentary caprice turn to aversion. He had dabbled a little in science, as he had dipped into the philosophy of art and love, and had bestowed considerable thought upon the reproduction of hereditary traits.

'It is inconceivable to me,' he said one day to Mr. Ferris, 'that a woman of rough parentage should show so many outward traces of refinement.'

The old man chuckled malignly.

'Ah! I see of what you are thinking. It would ruffle your family prejudices if you were to impale the arms of a bullock-driver upon the Barrington shield. Make your mind easy. Where there is wealth, no one asks questions.'

Money gilds deeper stains than that of labour. But the blood runs thick. We shall see.'

'You misunderstand me,' replied Barrington. 'I looked at the subject merely from an abstract point of view. I think,' he added thoughtfully, 'that there must be a strain of genius in Miss Longleat's nature, which partly explains its manifold inconsistencies.'

'Genius!' said Mr. Ferris, derisively. 'You degrade the sacred title.'

'I said the "strain of genius." My dear sir, there may be a strain of insanity, which need not imply the necessity for confinement in a lunatic asylum. I should more properly have termed it *passionate intelligence*.'

'Dear heart!' said Mrs. Ferris innocently, mystified by the above dialogue, which had taken place in her hearing, 'I never noticed anything particularly clever about Honoria. I have always been thankful, for my part, that she was not born a genius. They are poor creatures at the best of times, and she is a fine strapping girl that it is a pleasure to see. I am sure the way she has devoted herself to Janie is just wonderful. There is something noble about her that folks in general don't heed.'

In spite of his eager attendance upon Honoria, Barrington contrived to devote some time and thought to Angela. She was at this period much occupied with her painting, and it was in her studio that her sweetest hours were passed. Thither he often followed her. Her love had given a fresh impetus to the prosecution of her art, and her feverish excitement, arising from a cause which she knew not how to define, found relief in work. She appeared more silent and self-engrossed than ever, at the present time, preferring solitude and musing to the buzz of companionship. Her fluctuations of innocent gaiety were less frequent than of old, and the shadow which had always encompassed her

seemed to have deepened into a mournful tenderness, which even Barrington's light caresses, bestowed lavishly as upon a lovely child, hardly dissipated. He accepted her guileless affection as though it were a breath of that tender perfume of womanhood which was so necessary to his existence; and if her wistful eyes, mutely demanding something which he had not to give, aroused a faint feeling of self-reproach in his mind, it was speedily allayed by her unconscious acceptance of his fraternal attitude, and her own childishness which seemed to place her beyond the pale of ceremonious restrictions.

It became a custom with Barrington and Honoria to spend every evening an hour or more by the banks of the lagoon. The nights, warm and still, starlit and laden with the dewy scent of flowers, were provocative of suggestive conversation, in which thoughts and words flowed in unconventional channels, and dangerous allusions were tentatively uttered and softened by that mingling of daring and tenderness which, in the case of such men as Barrington, was calculated to exercise a powerful influence upon a woman of Honoria's temperament.

Yet she had sometimes a helpless sense of being dominated by an influence of which she had not rightly estimated the strength, and felt a terrified longing for guidance, in which her thoughts turned instinctively towards Dyson Maddox. In her efforts at self-analysis she vainly asked herself why she, who had hitherto accepted the adoration of her lovers with regal self-complacency, should suddenly have become a prey to vague tremors and alternate fits of excitability and silent depression, when either her spirits were at boiling-pitch, or a heavy load seemed laid upon her heart and her tears flowed readily. Whence had arisen these strange thrills, which could not be exactly defined as either painful or pleasurable—that sensuous intoxication



succeeded by moments of horrible revulsion, during which she hated both herself and him ?

One evening, when their talk had drifted from generalities to personal subjects, Barrington stooped suddenly, and gathered one of the half-closed buds that floated upon the lagoon.

'These lotus-lilies,' he said, 'remind me of a type of womanhood which I know—passionate, yet pure—combining the frankness of innocence with the strongest susceptibility to the influence of love.'

Honorina took the lily from his hand, and held it against her flushed face.

Barrington went on :

'You know whom I mean. Such a creature could only have had birth in a wild free atmosphere. She belongs to woods and streams ; she is the classic nymph—the essence of womanliness. You are the ideal Australia. Could I pay you a higher compliment ?'

'I dislike flattery ; in some moods it irritates me. And you always speak so strangely. I never know how far I may place confidence in you.'

'To women who have trusted me I have always been loyal,' said Barrington, deliberately. 'But I might turn the tables upon you. How far are you sincere with me ? What do I know for certain of your position ? It is said upon the Koorong that you are to marry your father's colleague, Mr. Maddox.'

'That is not true,' replied Honorina, gravely.

'I am told also that you are a dangerous coquette—that you lead men on to love you, and then coldly reject them.'

'It is no crime in a man to be attractive. Why should a woman be denied the use of her only weapon ?'

'You plead guilty, then ? You are a coquette ?'

'I confess to being fond of power,' said Honorina.

'You seem to tire easily of most things,' said Barrington. There must be a sameness in receiving perpetual adoration. Would it not be a change if you were to stoop a little, and to love——'

'It would be a change certainly,' said Honoria, trying to speak without consciousness. 'I do not think that it would be an agreeable one.'

After this, they were both silent. She knew that his eyes were fixed upon her; and though she would have given much for the power to lift her head and resolutely return his gaze, she dared not do so. She had a longing to rise and shake herself free from the fascination which was creeping over her and numbing her powers of resistance. She trembled, and was ashamed that he should see how she was moved. Her only safety seemed to lie in flight, and she made confession of her weakness by leaving him.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

'YOU'LL GET THE CROOKED STICK AT LAST.'

ONE morning, while they were all lingering over the breakfast-table, there was a barking of dogs without, a vigorous cracking of stock-whips, and presently Lord and Lady Dolph Bassett, accompanied by Cornelius Cathcart, dismounted at the gate.

'How do you do, Honoria?' cried Lady Dolph in her good-humoured drawl—'how do you do, Mrs. Ferris? Oh, no fear that we are not hungry—why, we started at six o'clock this morning. I said to Dolph that we should have to hit off pretty sharp if we wanted to be in time for breakfast. We have come to see after our new chum—oh, there you are, Mr. Barrington! And Dolph has got some green

notion in his head about a gully that is down by Dyraaba Creek, and that he wants to turn into a kind of rockery like the Springs over here.'

'I say, Miss Longleat, it is no end of a stunner!' said Lord Dolph, excitedly. 'I always said that I should never be contented with Dyraaba till I had found as jolly a spot as the Springs within half a mile of the head station. But there's a gully behind Jaff's Peak that only wants some of that hoya and creeping stuff that grows over the rocks to make it perfect. And I have brought over a pack-horse on purpose to take back roots. You will let us ride out to the Springs this afternoon?'

'I am very glad that you have come,' said Honoria. 'We have been planning an expedition to the Koorong Waterfalls to-morrow. You will be able to get some plants there. I was thinking of writing to ask you to come over. I did send a note to Mr. Maddox. Is he at Barramunda?' she added, turning to Cathcart.

'He was electioneering for Sandy Stewart at Canoona yesterday,' replied the manager. 'I dare say that he will get your note this evening, and will ride over before breakfast to-morrow.'

'You have had a narrow escape from a parson,' continued Mr. Cathcart, as they all sat down to a relay of hot scones and boiling coffee, which Mrs. Ferris had promptly provided. 'One of the army of the faithful turned up at Barramunda a few days ago, and held a service in the dining-room. Lord! how he pitched into us for our ungodliness; but when I explained to him that we had not had a black coat on the place for ten years, he was forced to own that it was by God's mercy we were not greater sinners. As our black-boy remarked, "That fellow cawbawn woollah woollah."\* It was quite the case. He told us that there was a mighty field

\* 'Talks a great deal.'

for his labours on the Koorong district. Anyhow, he was well paid, for each of the men had to fork up ten bob for his ghostly counsel. How I detest that unctuous self-sufficient tribe which is so plentiful out here! He started off to come to this station; but Bully Dick, who owed him a grudge, led him into a bog, and left him to his fate. He was last seen splicing up his buggy wheels, and vowing that the accident was a divine indication that there were no souls to be saved "over there." Rather rough upon Kooralbyn—eh, Mrs. Ferris?

'Indeed,' said Aunt Penelope, 'I'd be glad to see a decent clergyman if the bishop would only send us one. I'm not too clever to mind my religion, as is the way with some people,' glancing maliciously at Mr. Ferris, who stroked his beard; 'but what is the use of a little black shrimp that has not got an *h* in his head, and can only tell us that we are all nigh to 'ell? It's an insult to a body's understanding.'

At luncheon, the whole party, with the exception of Angela, appeared prepared for the ride to the Springs—a picturesque ravine in the mountains.

Later, Barrington sought the girl in her studio, and found her with her palette untouched, seated at the window, wistful and unoccupied.

'Are you not coming with us, Angela?' he asked.

'No,' she replied; 'I am not going either to-day or to-morrow. I do not care for these foolish chattering people. I will stay and occupy myself with my art and try to be happy. Do I not know what they call me? I have heard Lady Dolph say that I have "a shingle loose." Her laughter gives me a pain here,' touching her head; 'and besides, I want to be alone.'

'You shut yourself up too closely,' said Barrington, pressing her hand. 'Are you well, dear child? Your flesh is hot and feverish, and your voice weak.'

'Oh yes, I am well,' replied Angela: 'I only want to be alone. I shall go down to the river and listen to the water murmuring, and perhaps the spirits will come and talk to me and still my pain. You must go—they are calling you.'

He lifted her hand to his lips, and left her. The rest of the party were mounted.

'Angela is working,' said Mr. Ferris, as he passed. 'She is out of her element here. It is better that she should be left to herself.'

For the first few miles Barrington rode beside Lady Dolph; her husband with Honoria. Mrs. Ferris, who was always aggrieved if debarred from these expeditions, wearing a voluminous grey habit, and a mushroom hat tied beneath her chin, was escorted by Corny Cathcart; and the old man, wrapped in poetic musings, brought up the rear.

'I am glad that you like Barrington,' said Lord Dolph, diplomatically, to Honoria. 'I think myself that it is a pity he left England. He has not been used to roughing it. I am certain that Australia will not suit him. Now I rather like the fun of blacking my own boots upon occasions.'

'What made Mr. Barrington leave England?' asked Honoria directly, somewhat doubtful of Hardress's plea of poverty.

Lord Dolph looked confused, and evaded the question.

'Oh, he had his reasons, I suppose! Some fellows like change. He was in the Life Guards—no end of a swell in London. But a man needs a lot of money to keep up in these crack regiments, and Barrington is a younger son, and has not got a brother like Headington to fall back upon—Sir Lionel is a beastly screw. I say, Miss Longleat, Barrington is better suited for office-work than for the bush. Your father does not want a private secretary, or a treasury clerk, does he?'

'My father would not give a Government post to anyone

who had not good claims upon the country. He hates the suspicion of favouritism—at least——'

And Honoria stammered and coloured.

'You are thinking of Vallancy's appointment. What a deuce of a row the papers kicked up! I never could see the reason of it myself. I dare say that he is a very good fellow, but it is a pity that he has the reputation of being such a brute. Do we stop here?'

Miss Longleat had reined in her horse before a log-hut situated in the bend of the creek.

'Only for a moment. I want to say good-bye to Grannie Deans before I go to Leichardt's Town. I shall not have another opportunity. Sam Deans will be out of prison next week.'

'I hear that he swears vengeance against the Premier for getting him put into the lock-up. Shall I help you down, Mrs. Ferris?'

'No, thank you,' replied the old lady. 'I am not so fond of encouraging Sammy Deans as some folks are'—with a side-glance at her husband—'and if I once got off my horse, I should never get up again. Good-day to you, Mrs. Deans,' she added kindly, addressing a hard-featured woman, who, with her gown tucked up, and a calico sun-bonnet on her head, was feeding a small family of chickens at the door. 'And how are your poultry getting on?'

Whereupon there ensued a discussion anent the laying capabilities of Spanish and Dorking hens, in which Lord and Lady Dolph joined with deep interest.

Miss Longleat passed into the hut, where, in an inner chamber, an old woman lay bedridden.

She was stretched upon a poorly-furnished wooden settle, her attenuated frame covered with a patchwork quilt. Myriads of flies buzzed among the limp mosquito curtains, and a tin billy containing some cold tea stood on a small table by the bed-side. In an old kerosine tin by the open

window bloomed a fine geranium, and the wail was papered with leaves from the *Illustrated News*.

‘I have come to bid you good-bye, mother,’ said Honoria.

The old woman raised a yellow, wrinkled face, and extended a lean hand.

‘You are going to Leichardt’s Town, then. Well, I am sorry, for it is dull here sin’ Sam was sent to quod, and her’—indicating by a glance the woman without—‘has to look arter the stock. No fear of her a’stealin’ any of your cattle. But I don’t bear no malice—happen Sam ’ull do that when he comes out. . . . So you are agoin’ among the fine folk. Now’s your time to enjoy life. You’ll never be no younger. You’ll be dancing, I suppose?’

‘I dare say, Mrs. Deans.’

‘I warn’t brought up to dance,’ said the old woman. ‘I wur one of ten, and a religious family; and I wur a good age when I come out to this country. There’s folks outside, ain’t there? Is’t Mr. Maddox?’

‘No,’ replied Honoria; and she enumerated the party by name.

‘Corny Cathcart is sweet on you, they say. I don’t think much of him, but his snarl is waur than his bite. T’other’s a new one. Happen a whipper-snapper from England. You’d be too good for he. Mind what I say’—and she laid her hand impressively upon Honoria’s arm—‘don’t you try to pick and choose. If you do, you’ll get the crooked stick at last. Do ye mind now?’

‘Yes, mother; but how is a girl to know?’

‘Ay! how is a girl to know?’ repeated Grannie Deans, reflectively. ‘There’s some as takes you unawares like, and some as grows upon you. Choose him as has knowed you the longest, and has loved you the truest. I’ve heard that you are one to give men a heartache. Maybe your own ’ull ache some day.’

'Good-bye, mother,' said Honoria, hurriedly. 'I mustn't keep them waiting outside. If Sam will be civil to me I'll come and see you again when I am back from Leichardt's Town.'

'He meant no harm,' said the old woman, sullenly. 'If Longleat had ha' left him alone he'd a done no worse than brand a calf or two, and what's that to you that have got thousands? But I can't answer for him now. He has been in quod, and the boy has died since they took him. It'll drive him nigh wild to see little Joey's grave. . . . Happen it were old Ferris and his grog and his Shakespeare that's done the mischief. Take my advice, and look sharp arter that old man. He has led my Sam astray, and he has no love for you or for your father either.'

The rest of the party had ridden slowly on, but young Mrs. Deans, still feeding her poultry, was conversing with Barrington in a north-English accent, curiously blended with the Australian drawl.

'Hur arn't half a bad un, arter all's said and done,' she was saying, as Honoria emerged from the hut. 'Hur have got some feeling. Since Longleat put Sam into gaol, and the little un died, hur have come to see us, and have brought mother flowers and wine, and such like. I used to think hur one of the stuck-up sort as hadn't a thought but for beaus; but I hain't got nought to say agen hur.'

The riders resumed their way, following the fringe of swamp oaks which marked the bed of the creek. Hanging branches of scented jasmine brushed their shoulders. Sometimes the river-banks closed in steep and rocky; sometimes broadened into a level pocket overgrown with bracken fern and blady grass. Sometimes the stream flowed in murmuring accompaniment to their talk; sometimes the water-course was shallow, dry, and stony. Now they were in a valley where sleek kine stood knee-deep in the rich pasturage, and



the she-oaks dropped their cones, and the hills on each side, crowned by a dark-green belt of scrub, rose higher and steeper, so that though it was early in the afternoon of a March day, they were in deep shade. The country looked as lonely as though no human foot had ever trodden it. Every now and then, the dogs would startle a covey of wild-duck, or a herd of unbroken horses would dart away into the fastnesses of the mountains.

‘Pr’r!’ exclaimed Lord Dolph, taking imaginary aim with the butt of his stock-whip, an implement which he always carried, whether it was likely to be necessary or superfluous. ‘Don’t this put you in mind of the capital day’s sport we had last year by Jaff’s Peak?’ he added, turning to Cathcart. ‘I say, Barrington, you should have seen me shoot two wild horses at one go! I saw ’em start, and I pulled up my gun—one barrel after another—it seemed like nothin’ at all—and down they fell—two of ’em!’

‘I hate the idea of shooting horses,’ said Honoria. ‘I’d as soon kill Durra.’

“A steed came pricking o’er the plain,”

softly quoted Mr. Ferris, lost in an undertoned rhapsody.

‘And indeed, Anthony,’ said Mrs. Ferris, ‘that’s just nonsense. I don’t understand what ye mean by *pricking*. If ye said trotting, cantering, or even ambling, there would be some sense in your remark.’

Now the mountains rose high in front, and they entered a trough, evidently of volcanic origin, cleft between two hills, in the centre of which ran a clear winding rivulet. Here they dismounted, and gave their horses into the charge of a black-boy and of Mrs. Ferris, who, calculating upon being able to reascend by means of one of the huge boulders scattered about, alighted, and, professing herself unequal to

the exertion of climbing, seated herself contentedly upon a rock and produced her knitting.

Mr. Ferris wandered off with his sketch-book to hold silent commune with nature.

'Oh!' exclaimed Cornelius Cathcart, in a jerky aside to Honoria, 'I like this. It's what philosophers call altruism. It's so wholesome to ride behind the person with whom you are dying to talk, and watch her flirting with some one else. It is still more salutary and elevating to one's morals to sit on a stump holding the bridles of three horses and being bored by an old lady's twaddle. I wonder why I came to Kooralbyn?'

'I wonder why, indeed!' laughed Miss Longleat. 'Aren't you coming up to the Springs?'

'No, thanks; I'll stay here. I prefer being bored by the old lady to boring the young one. And after all,' he added, meditatively, 'if I am bored, it is all in the day's work.'

He subsided into a heap upon a fallen tree. Honoria gathered up her skirt, and poising her feet firmly upon the slippery stones, crossed the limpid stream which flowed down the cleft. On each side, beneath the overhanging rocks, ferns and moss grew in dank luxuriance. Mountain lilies bloomed in feathery white tufts in the crannies, and the wild hoy, sweet as honey, spread its dark green leaves and waxen blossoms over the grey, lichen-covered stones.

The natural passage terminated in a high wall of rock, surmounted by a fringe of scrub foliage. At its base was a deep, mysterious pool, surrounded by jagged boulders, into which descended with a monotonous splash a small volume of water, flowing down a narrow ravine that cut laterally into the side of the hill.

Lord Dolph, in an ecstasy of delight, armed with a dilly-bag and a trowel, clambered up the precipice to search for roots. Lady Dolph, who was not greatly affected by the

beetles of water, seized herself upon a jutting rock and pulled out of her pocket a pocket-book and Mrs. Ferris had left her. Honora moved apart and stood gazing contemplatively into the water. Barrington joined her.

'I like to look into this pool. John Ball believes that it has no bottom. This is a lonely, eerie place but for me it has an extraordinary fascination. Mr. Barrington,' she added, turning impulsively towards him, 'I have half a mind to tell you of a strange dream that I had last night.'

'Don't hesitate, but let me hear it.'

'This place reminds me of it. I thought that you and I were struggling together in just such a way as this, only that there was no outlet on any side. The rocks which closed in round it were black and slimy, and when I tried to clutch them, my hands slipped away helplessly, and I was becoming exhausted. I grasped your coat, but you pushed me off. It seemed to me that you were in no danger, and that you looked on at my gasping efforts with a horrible smile. The inky water was just closing over my head. I screamed, and awoke with a ghastly sensation of drowning.'

'An unpleasant nightmare,' said Barrington, 'but easily accounted for. Every evening lately, before going to bed, we have sat at the edge of the lagoon. It was natural that the idea of water should suggest itself in your dreams.'

'We will stay indoors for the future then. There are not many nights remaining. I am going to Leichardt's Town immediately. But I have more to tell you. . . . I lay awake for a long time, alert and trembling. Do you know the nervous terror that creeps over one in the dead of night—a sense of infinite loneliness and helplessness and of contact with the spirits of darkness? . . . I fell asleep again, and this time I dreamed that we—you and I still—were standing side by side in our drawing-room at the Bunyas. You had your eyes fixed upon my face, and I felt instinctively that

you were magnetising me. I know nothing about the subject except what I have read in novels. It has always seemed to me a terrible notion that one human being might gain a moral ascendancy over another. I remember you told me the other day that you were interested in the subject of mesmerism.’

‘There again,’ said Barrington, ‘is the clue to your nightmare.’

‘I beseech you, if you possess the power, do not ever attempt to exercise it upon me. The feeling in my dream of vital collapse was insupportable. I seemed to struggle against a nameless horror, with the certainty of being conquered. It was worse than drowning.’

‘I am afraid that you blame me for having caused you a restless night,’ said Barrington. ‘But we are fellow-sufferers; there must be some sort of an affinity between us. I slept badly also, and had vivid dreams, in which you played a prominent part.’

At that moment Lord Dolph’s head appeared above the rocks. He was laden with ferns, creepers, and parasites—vegetable spoils of all kinds.

‘I have got what I wanted!’ he cried. ‘And now, Miss Longleat, if you don’t mind, I think that we’ll push home. I must put my roots into moist earth, and keep ’em as fresh as possible.’

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MUSIC IN THE VERANDA.

BARRINGTON gave Miss Longleat his hand, and guided her over the stepping-stones. Lord Dolph and his wife divided their botanical treasures; and they walked down the ravine to where Cathcart and the black-boy were holding the horses.

‘Have you heard much about the elections?’ asked Honoria of the superintendent, as they stood waiting for Mr. Ferris to reappear.

‘No ; I believe the Ministry will have a majority ; but I don’t take much interest in politics.’

‘Fie ! when you know that I dislike a lukewarm supporter almost as much as I detest a Radical.’

‘I thought your father called himself a Radical ?’

‘Only in his hatred of the hereditary privileges of rank. An English Radical is an Australian Conservative.’

‘I don’t dislike the extreme brood : they generally have ideas. Now, Sammy Deans is a fair specimen. At any rate he is amusing ; and if he does steal a calf now and then, I know several squatters who are given to “nuggeting.” He is mischievous, because he has just enough of education to convince him that all men should be equal, and that Australia ought to be a regenerated Great Britain—the Paradise of fools and working men ; but he is a less objectionable member of society than the illiterate shearer who occasionally touches his cap to his overseer and knocks down his cheque in a spree. Come—there is the old man ! Perhaps you will reward my silent heroism by allowing me to ride part of the way home with you ? Mrs. Ferris has been improving the occasion by impressing upon me how happy she is. I don’t object to people feeling happy ; but I do complain loudly of having the fact dinned into my ears ; it irritates me when I am feeling particularly out of sorts myself.’

Near the crossing they met Tom Dungie, who, with his mail-bags strapped before him, was riding leisurely along the bridle-track. He regarded Barrington with an air of amusement.

‘Well, I thought as I’d find you ’ere,’ he squeaked. ‘Gents ain’t much different to native dogs—they always run

on a trail. I have brought your bag, my lady. The house at Dyraaba was as empty as a sucked egg, and that there female at the huts didn't so much as offer me a cup of tea. I have got a note from Barramunda station, Miss Longleat. 'Twur Mr. Maddox himself as guv it me.'

Honorina coloured as she took it from his hand.

'Since you have been done out of your tea at Dyraaba, Dungie, you may have a glass of rum at the house.'

'Well, I don't know that I shouldn't relish a nobbler,' squeaked Dungie, winking slyly at Barrington. 'Not but what it is poor soil that is always needing to be watered, and too much grog ain't good for the palate, let alone for the stom-jack.'

'You do not read your note,' said Barrington, as they passed through the slip-rails.

'I will wait till I reach home,' said Honorina, not displeased to make use of the opportunity of teasing, at the same time dreading to show any sign of the mortification which a refusal upon Dyson's part would certainly entail upon her.

She had despatched her invitation during one of those moments of repulsion from Barrington, when her longings had turned in a rushing tide towards the suitor she had rejected. Ever since the sending of the letter she had been anxious as to its reception.

When she had gained her room, she eagerly tore open Maddox's note. It was a brief acceptance, and intimated that the writer would arrive at Kooralbyn early upon the following morning.

In truth, a chance remark uttered by Lord Dolph Bassett, and certain rumours of a flirtation between Honorina and the Englishman, which were current upon the Koorong, had affected Dyson deeply, and had actuated his reply. From what he had heard, he imagined that Barrington might be a man calculated to captivate the girl's fancy. The tones of

her note appealed to him. Half dreading, half hoping for the confirmation of his suspicions, he resolved to ride over to Kooralbryn and judge for himself.

Through a gap in her window-curtain Honoria caught sight of Barrington, as he leaned against the fence talking lightly to Janie. Was it the glimpse of his soldier-like figure and high-bred features, or the perusal of Maddox's curt letter, which shed a glow over her face, and caused her heart to throb with excitement? She leaned back in her chair with her arms twined above her head, while her bosom heaved gently, her lips became moist and trembling, and her eyes melted into womanly tenderness, as though at some passionate thought. Then she darted from her seat, plunged her face into a basin of cold water, and hastily proceeded to dress for dinner.

Towards the end of the meal the conversation turned upon the fate of an overseer in the neighbourhood, who had died in a fit of *delirium tremens*, due to disappointment in a love affair with his master's daughter. Lady Dolph animadverted severely upon the conduct of the girl in question.

'Is a woman heartless,' asked Barrington, with his eyes fixed upon Honoria's face, 'because she refuses to gratify the passion of one man at the expense of the happiness of another?'

'I object to the theory that women are to blame for the folly of men!' exclaimed Cornelius Cathcart. 'Why should the weaker sex be raised to such an important position in the scale of creation? One would really imagine, to hear sentimentalists talk, that the male mission in life is to gratify the vanity and caprice of women. Society would be a little less boring if there were no question of love.'

'I think that we women always get the worst of it,' said Honoria, rising abruptly from the table. 'Come, let us eat our dessert in the veranda.'

Her suggestion was adopted ; only Barrington and Angela

lingered in the dining-room. Honoria wandered to some little distance from the party, and Cathcart, following her, seated himself at her feet.

‘Why do you speak so bitterly of women?’ she asked.

‘I detest shams. It is degrading to hear man quoted as the superior animal, and yet to know that he is at the mercy of inconsistent selection.’

‘Do you think,’ said Honoria, looking at him with troubled eyes, ‘that a woman is wrong to experimentalise till she finds the best that life can give her?’

‘Why cry out so against vivisection? The cruelty which serves science is surely less blamable than that which morally mutilates for the benefit of the individual. Tell me,’ he added abruptly, ‘what has come over you since I was last at Kooralbyn? You have altered; you seem to have lost self-confidence. Did you see Maddox on his way down to Leichardt’s Town?’

‘Yes; for a short time.’

‘I knew his mission. Will you tell me its result?’

‘There is nothing to tell.’

‘Nor ever will be—in that quarter?’

‘No. . . .’

‘So he is the victim of an experiment. If I had not studied you closely, I should have expected to find you to-day wearing the simper appropriate to congratulations. I see further experiments are in progress. Some chemicals are dangerous to handle, and there are passions that don’t bear tampering with. Take my advice, and be careful. Well,’ he added in an altered tone, ‘I am glad at any rate that you have spared me the painful necessity of leaving Barramunda. There would not be room on the station for the superintendent and the master’s wife.’

‘I say, Miss Longleat,’ cried Lord Dolph, ‘won’t you play us something?’



'Yes, do,' said Cathcart. 'It is one of the signs of the advance of civilisation that men are no longer compelled to turn over leaves. I have got no more conversation. Sing, and let me be quiet. May I move this chair into the garden? Thanks. Now I can enjoy two of the most delightful things in the world—music and tobacco.'

He subsided in a heap into one of the canvas chairs, lit his pipe, and spoke no more.

Honorina entered the drawing-room and sat down to the piano. Barrington, to whom music was exquisite bliss or keen pain, trembled as she approached the instrument. He feared disenchantment. Strangely enough, during his stay at Kooralbyn, it had never occurred to him to ask her to play, and she had never done so voluntarily. About her music, as about other things, she was capricious. When the opening prelude told him that, in this respect at least, their natures were in unison, his joy found vent in a long sigh.

He was accustomed to say that melody is one of the strongest determinants of the passions. From his childhood its influence over him had been remarkable. The first time that he had heard an opera, he had retreated to the back of the box and wept silently. There was something almost womanish in his intense susceptibility.

Honorina played airs from 'Lohengrin.' The lamp had not yet been brought in, and the room was in half darkness. Outside, a red moon was slowly rising behind the Koorong Crag, and was reflected in the dim expanse of the lagoon; the sombre disk of forest and plain seemed infinite; the gentlemen were smoking on the veranda, and Angela, pale and shadowy, was pacing the gravel walk with Mr. Ferris, who was pointing out an effect of moonlight upon the rocks. Barrington sat in a vine-screened corner whence he could watch the player. Honorina appeared lost in her music. . . . Now she passed on to some quaint devotional airs by

Bach. . . . Passion succeeded reverie ; a great yearning predominated over both. There the true artistic life found expression : the subtle perfume of emotion was breathed, and, as it were, enchained : the two minds, dissonant and mutually incomprehensive, were brought for the moment into complete harmony. 'Yes, yes,' the music seemed to say, 'I understand your needs, your inconsistencies, your fleeting impressionability—the mingling of the sensuous with the spiritual in the natures of both of you. I comprehend and I satisfy.'

'Ah!' said Mrs. Ferris in a plaintive tone to Lord Dolph, 'I wish she would play something of Verdi's. I like music that sends a cold current down my spine, that makes my legs tingle and my nerves quiver. Italian melodies are like the flowers of an English summer. They have the breath of roses and the perfume of mignonette. But your grand classical harmonies are no better than these gorgeous tropical blossoms, that only make me long the more for something homely and sweet, like lavender and cherry-pie.'

Lady Dolph giggled, as she always did when anything was said that she did not quite understand. The spell was broken. Honoria ceased playing. Lady Dolph's voice had been the jarring note which mars all earthly harmony.

She sank into a chair a little distance from Barrington.

'I think that the lives of some of us are a long quest after æsthetic perfection, which is most nearly realised in music,' he said in an undertone, drawing closer to her. 'I do not thank you ; I only say that you have not disappointed me.'

'Barrington,' said Lord Dolph, 'you are first-rate without an accompaniment. Sing us something—it is so jolly sitting here.'

'I never sit in a veranda in summer,' said Lady Dolph, 'without thinking of snakes, especially when anyone is playing. They are so fond of music. They creep along the

boards, and get under one's gown, and perhaps wind themselves round one's ankles. Do you remember, Dolph?' etc., etc.

'Dear heart!' cried Mrs. Ferris, feeling her stout legs in alarm: 'I never thought of that. Angela, my child, it is too late for you to be sitting out in the dew. Let us both go indoors.'

'I will sing to *you*,' whispered Barrington to Honoria.

Silence fell upon the group as soon as his voice was raised in that exquisitely passionate serenade, to which Shelley's words are set:

'I arise from dreams of thee. In the first sweet sleep of night,  
When the winds are breathing low, and the stars are shining bright,  
I arise from dreams of thee. And a spirit in my feet  
Has led me—who knows how?—to thy chamber-window, sweet.'

Honoria leaned back in her chair, half shading her face with her hands. The light was too dim for either to see quite plainly the features of the other; but she knew that each thrilling note was addressed to her, and her frame quivered in response to the passionate appeal.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A PICNIC IN THE MOUNTAINS.

UPON the following morning, when, after a disturbed night, Honoria entered the breakfast-room, she found that Dyson Maddox had already arrived.

His manly aspect, the mingled sweetness and firmness of his expression, struck her with a sudden force, which revealed too clearly how far her thoughts had wandered in another direction.

'You must have started very early,' she said.

'I left Barramunda at daybreak. The early morning is the most pleasant time for riding. I met Cathcart at the Crossing.'

'He has gone, then?'

'Yes; he thought that one of us ought to be on the station. There were butchers expected.'

'I—I am glad that you have come,' said Honoria, hurriedly.

He looked at her gravely without replying, and she resumed in an embarrassed manner :

'I heard that you were canvassing yesterday. What news of the election?'

'It is going well for us,' replied Dyson. 'Your father is more popular than ever. The squatters will have a walk over.'

At that moment Barrington entered, and Honoria introduced the two men, who had not met before. Maddox was stiff and ungenial. Barrington courteous and indifferent. Honoria was ill at ease; her self-possession had vanished, and her complexion alternated between paleness and flushing. Dyson could not help observing that there seemed a covert understanding between her and the Englishman. The latter frequently addressed her in a low tone, as though there were some veiled meaning in his remark; when their hands touched, her eyes drooped; when she spoke to him, her voice had a faltering intonation; when she looked at him, there was a timid consciousness on her face. All these signs Maddox noted and interpreted. And the more he watched, the colder and sterner his manner became.

Soon after breakfast the horses were brought round, and the party mounted. Only Angela and Mrs. Ferris, both unequal to the long excursion, remained at home. Cobra Ball, leading a pack-horse, rode in front; and a tribe of

kangaroo-dogs brought up the rear. The air felt clear and fresh, with the foretaste of winter, though the sun was powerful enough to scorch Lady Dolph's freckled complexion. The atmosphere was perfumed by wild flowers and scented gum, and the lush grass upon the plain was studded with orchids and violets. As they left the slip-rails behind, a flock of white cockatoos rose chattering and screeching from the cultivation paddock, where the yellow squashes and green preserving melons were lying bare of leaves, and a black gin, with her head bound in a crimson kerchief, stood, a picturesque object, among the late corn.

They crossed the river and skirted the scrub, dim with the dense luxuriance of its dark green foliage, enlivened here and there by patches of brilliant bloom, of yellow begonia, and feathery muntein, while clusters of wild plums and black and crimson berries announced the close of summer.

All round them was the hum of forest life ; bright-hued butterflies and whirring locusts flitted among the tangled brushwood. Every now and then a rustle in the grass betrayed the whereabouts of an iguana or a snake. Sometimes they were startled by the strange cry of the tree-frog, or the hissing sound with which the frilled lizard accompanies the erection of its ruff. Now, they started a herd of kangaroo—the graceful brown creatures with their fawn-like eyes and drooping paws, still for a moment, then bounding in long fleet strides over the brow of the ridge, the dogs following in full cry ; and even Cobra Ball, in spite of the encumbrance of his pack, unable to resist the infection of sport, spurred his horse, and uttered vigorous halloos.

'I must have a gallop,' cried Honoria, casting a rapid glance at Barrington, and lightly touching her spirited chestnut.

Accustomed to its mistress's vagaries, the animal, which was indeed the pride of Thomas Longleat's stables, shook

the reins upon its neck, cleared a fallen tree, and darted at breakneck pace through the thick timber with which the hill was clothed. Dyson, with the zest of a keen sportsman, and a seat that defied accidents, pushed past Honoria in a race to the fore. It was dangerous riding. The slope was stony, encumbered with logs and brushwood, and heavily timbered. At its foot was a gully, and then a wide plain covered with the waving purple grass peculiar to that district, which conceals many a treacherous pitfall. Beyond, again, were ridges and never-ending vistas of trees.

The Englishman, with a vivid recollection of Leicestershire runs, felt his blood rising to the sport. The kangaroos had divided, and were being pursued in different directions by the excited dogs; but one 'old man,' bounding in a straight line across the plain, showed easiest chase, and looked as though he meant staying. The hounds, every vein in their sleek brown hides swelling with eagerness and effort, were in hot course. Honoria was poised like an Amazon upon her saddle, her skirts brushing the grass as she rode neck and neck with Dyson. Her cheeks glowed with a brilliant carmine—a long trail of her hair, loosened by the wind, floated behind. Every now and then she darted a glance at her companion in the rear.

At the foot of the opposite ridge, the kangaroo turned and faced his assailants, holding himself erect and striking with his paws at the dogs which closed round him. His tongue protruded, and the blood flowed from a wound in his side. Dyson advanced to put an end to the struggle. Honoria turned, and, joining Barrington, whose horse had slackened speed, rode more slowly across the plain towards the others on her right.

'Now you have seen a kangaroo-hunt,' said she. 'It is short enough; but I could gallop like that for hours. That brisk stirring of one's blood is perfect enjoyment. No

danger is too great to face when one is on horseback. I sometimes go out on purpose when there is a thunderstorm rising, in order to have the pleasure of racing it home. . . . But there is one drawback to excitement—some one, or something, is sure to suffer. I cannot bear kangaroos to be killed. I should detest fox-hunting if it were really done in cold blood. In this sort of thing one has no time to think, and as often as not the kangaroo escapes.'

Presently Cobra Ball rode on ahead with the kangaroo's tail swinging at his saddle, and the poor 'old man' was food for carrion crows.

They rode on through tall gum-trees and yellow wattles, with here and there a clump of grass-trees, their bare stems, tufted tops, and spear-like spikes contrasting with the lank eucalypti, and breaking the monotony of foliage.

As they advanced, level pastures and undulating ridges ceased. Before them towered the rock-bound sides of the Koorong Crag. The track grew more and more indistinct, and the country became stony and arid, intersected by deep gullies and ferny ravines, that afforded scant foothold for the horses, and were sufficiently alarming to make the most practised bushman careful.

'Now then!' cried Lady Dolph to Barrington, as they dipped into a gully, and were confronted by a stony pinch almost as steep as the crag above them, 'spur up that crawler, or he'll jib before he gets to the top. Sit forward, and lay on like old gooseberry to his mane.'

At last they had reached the highest spur below the Koorong precipice. It was flat as a bowling-green, and quite untimbered. Below it, for miles, stretched a sea of blue-green foliage, with waves of wooded ridges. To the left lay a range of distant mountains, their rocky outlines bathed in the golden glow of Australian sunlight, and flecked with the shadows that chased each other across the blue. Directly

upon the right rose a forest of pines hoary with moss, their interlacing branches describing vistas of impenetrable gloom. A rocky rampart, five hundred feet in height, reared itself in front of the riders. Ferns and mountain-parasites clung to its rugged sides. At its base, a little stream of clear water trickled over a bed of stones and lost itself in the scrub. The buzz of woodland life had ceased, and the stillness and solitude were almost oppressive.

'That fellow Debbil-Debbil like it there,' said Cobra Ball, confidentially.\* 'Cawbawn big water-hole, lie along a scrub. My word, plenty fellow bunya bunya. Other fellow black men come, eat; but ba'al sit down here. That ole woman mother along a Cobra Ball go bong like it this place. Black fellow say, "Ba'al, me wantem that ole woman. Suppose me dig em hole, and bury close along a camp, she get up again. Me carry that ole woman budgery way, and put in ground close up scrub." Mine think it Cobra Ball stop here and look after yarraman. Ba'al, that fellow go along a scrub.'

'Get the billy, Cobra Ball, and set the fire alight,' cried Dyson, energetically.

The explorer was at his ease in such scenes as this. He chose a shady spot for the encampment, and cut some grass-tree-tops to make a couch for the ladies.

'We had better eat our luncheon,' he said, 'before we attempt the waterfall.'

Cobra Ball filled the black quart at the spring, made a fire with twigs, and set the water to boil. Lady Dolph

\* 'The devil is there. There is a big water-hole in the scrub, and many bnyas' (a species of fir, bearing an edible cone). 'Other blacks come and eat, but do not remain. Cobra Ball's mother died near here. The blacks said, "We do not want that old woman. If we bury her near the camp, she will haunt us: we will carry her a long way and bury her in the scrub." Cobra Ball will stop here and look after the horses; he will not go to the scrub.' (The blacks have a superstition that the spirits of their dead haunt the spot where they die for a year.)



superintended the pint-pot tea, and Barrington and Miss Longleat unpacked the luncheon-bags.

When the meal was over, the ladies girded themselves for mountaineering, and, leaving their horses under the black-boy's charge, the little party made their way for half a mile through the scrub.

Progress was here a matter of difficulty. Dense brush-wood and closely-packed saplings presented an almost impenetrable hedge, and luxuriant, large-leaved creepers hung in long withes from the branches of the tall trees. In the centre, as it were, of this wilderness, they came upon a small clear plain, which skirted the edge of a deep ravine. Honoria approached lightly to the side, and holding with one hand to a tree that grew near, peered over into a chasm cleft in the mountain of rock some hundreds of feet in depth. Flowing down a subterranean water-course, of which at a considerable height the progress was abruptly checked, a large volume of water dashed over the precipice into the pool below.

'My word!' said Lady Dolph, after having contemplated the scene for several minutes. 'It's awful grand, isn't it? but I am close-up done with the walking. I think that I'll take it easy for a bit,' and she sat down calmly and began to munch some wild plums which they had gathered in the scrub.

'I am in the mood to explore,' said Honoria; 'who will come with me?'

Two of the gentlemen answered to her call. Mr. Ferris produced a pocket Shakespeare, and deliberately seated himself upon a log.

'Well, I am glad that some one is going to stop,' said Lady Dolph. 'Mr. Ferris can read poetry if he likes. I think I'll go to sleep. You'll find me here when you come back, and give a coo-ée to let us know where you are.'

'You'll come,' said Honoria to Dyson, her tone implying command. Barrington and Lord Dolph had already moved on. Soon the four figures had disappeared in the mazes of the scrub.

Lady Dolph, after several attempts to draw Mr. Ferris into conversation, quietly composed herself into slumber.

When she awoke the air felt chill and damp, and it seemed as though she had been asleep for a long while. A strange sense of unreality overpowered her. She had forgotten where she was. The booming of the waterfall, mingled with the tones of Mr. Ferris's voice, as he fervidly ranted Othello's address to his dead mistress.

Lady Dolph rubbed her eyes, and looked round. Her companions had not yet returned. She began to feel a little frightened, for she had heard Mr. Ferris described in colonial parlance as 'cracked.' She knew nothing of Shakespeare, and distrusted the sound of Othello's eloquent self-upbraidings.

'I—I wish that you would stop,' she said nervously. 'I don't understand all that bosh. I'd like to know the time; it seems getting late. Don't you think they ought to be coming back?'

'It is nearly five o'clock,' said Mr. Ferris, looking at his watch.

'My word!' exclaimed Lady Dolph in consternation, 'if this doesn't bang everything. They must have got bushed. Dolph is such a greenhorn. If I had a stock-whip, I'd crack it smart. Let us give a shout——'

The old voice and the young were raised in prolonged coo-èès. Presently an answering call resounded through the forest.

'It's all right,' cried Maggie; 'that is Dolph's voice. They are coming.'

But only Lord Dolph's round face and stripling figure emerged from the scrub.

'Where are the others?' cried Maggie and Mr. Ferris.

'Hullo! aren't they here? I stopped to cut down this staghorn fern. Ain't he a beauty, Mags? We'll put him on to our verandah post. By Jove, it is odd they haven't turned up! I have been loitering for ever so long in the scrub. I thought that I should have found them here. Miss Longleat was wild after quantongs,\* and they said that they would come back by the gully. Let us coo-ée again.'

And once more long musical notes hovered in the air, but produced no reply.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### IN THE SCRUB.

THE stillness of the scrub was almost oppressive as Honoria and her companions wandered on. Trees of giant stature, and of almost primeval growth, closed thickly over their heads, and shut out all the glare of sunlight. As the brushwood became less dense the bottle-trees reared themselves aloft like great white pillars, and on every side there stretched dim vistas of trunk and foliage, resembling cathedral aisles roofed with pendent moss. The glossy bunyas, laden with their ripening cones, promised an aboriginal feast. Strange creepers and brilliant-hued flowers tapestried the grey irregularly-shaped stones, which seemed scattered promiscuously upon the ground; and at every moment fallen logs, moss-grown and worm-eaten, impeded their steps.

\* A berry growing in the scrub, the kernels of which are strung into necklaces.

Avoiding Honoria, Dyson walked on in front with Lord Dolph, only turning to say sharply :

‘Do not forget that we are skirting the ravine, and may chance unawares upon a precipice.’

The ground was rough, and once or twice Miss Longleat stumbled.

‘Won’t you take my hand?’ said Barrington.

The words were commonplace enough, nevertheless her cheeks flushed and her eyes brightened with inward excitement as they met his. She was torn between two impulses—the one to overtake Maddox and beseech his protection from a peril she dared not name—the other to yield blindly to the fascination which Barrington’s voice and touch were weaving round her.

‘No,’ she replied brusquely, ‘I don’t want help?’

‘We are coming to a stony place,’ continued Barrington, steadily. ‘It is rough walking. You had better accept my arm.’

‘Why do you force me to do what I dislike?’ cried Honoria, at the same time stretching forth her hand, which was immediately enclosed in his. ‘I am accustomed to being independent—I hate to be helped over rough ways. . . . But all day long I seem to be fighting against your influence—it is stronger than I. It makes me feel—do—what is abhorrent to me in every way—little and great. . . . I don’t know how it is,’ she added, with an uncertain kind of laugh ; ‘I have changed lately.’

‘That is what I wish,’ said Barrington, and his grasp upon her fingers involuntarily tightened.

‘Fie!’ exclaimed Honoria, recovering herself, and trying to appear saucy. ‘You pay me a poor compliment. Most people like me best as I am.’

‘I do not wish to be classed among “the many” by you,’ said Barrington. ‘It is my longing that you should think

of me as apart from others—otherwise I should have no influence over you—and I am ambitious . . . New possibilities are dawning upon me and upon you,' he continued, in eager, tremulous tones. 'If you would listen to the faint stirring of your emotions—if you would obey the impulse of your heart, we might both know the keenest joy possible. . . . What is better than to love? Oh, stoop and be sweet to me. There is nothing commonplace about you—you cannot do things by halves. It is not in your nature to be contented with stale sensation. You will take out of life what is best worth having. That is what I wish to give you—the best that I know of.'

'And if I do not think it worth accepting?' she said in a low tone.

'You must do so if you allow yourself to *feel*. Do not steel yourself against the promptings of your womanhood. I implore you do not hold yourself aloof from me. At least,' he cried insistently, 'let me meet your eyes . . . You are not afraid to look at me? Honoria—'

He drew closer to her, and she felt herself compelled to turn her face towards his. Reluctance and fascination were blended in her glance. His lips and eyes were eloquent with passion, which communicated itself to her frame. It was unwholesome intoxication, but potent while it lasted. Her lips trembled and moved inarticulately . . . With a violent effort she wrenched herself from his grasp.

It was at this moment that Lord Dolph paused to cut down his staghorn fern, and announced his intention of re-joining Maggie.

'A fellow cannot lug this about, you know,' he said, 'and I dare say Maddox and Barrington will manage to gather your quantongs for you, Miss Longleat.'

Dyson turned to Honoria, and caught the swift glance of appeal which she directed towards him.

‘Should you like to return?’ he asked.

‘Oh, not yet. This is delightful. There is nothing so fascinating as exploring; you know that, Mr. Maddox. I have set my heart upon getting some quantongs for a necklace. The blacks say that there are plenty in this scrub. Lord Dolph may carry back his fern—we will go on.’

She spoke with feverish gaiety. Inwardly she was reflecting that there was greater safety in a trio than in a quartette.

After walking a little way, and conversing constrainedly about the scenery and the vegetation, they came upon a quantong-tree, and pausing beneath it, began to pick up the fallen fruit. Mutual embarrassment made the occupation engrossing, and before long they had filled pockets and pouches. Against a narrow line of brushwood a few paces off there lay a fallen tree, which offered an inviting resting-place. They sat down and began to sort their spoils. There were so many berries, each containing a shapely nut, that Honoria might string a dozen necklaces.

‘We are a long way from the camp,’ said Dyson, ‘and it is nearly four o’clock; we ought to be turning our steps.’

He spoke wearily, as though the excursion had no zest for him. Honoria leaned forward and looked questioningly into his face, but he avoided meeting her eyes. It needed all his self-control to enable him to stifle any active expression of his hatred and jealousy of the Englishman.

‘It is very pleasant here,’ said Barrington, ‘and there is a bright moon. Surely we have no need to hasten home.’

As he spoke, an unlucky movement of his arm broke off a rotten limb of the log upon which they were seated, and sent it crashing to the ground. Like lightning, a flat brown head protruded itself from beneath a piece of the loosened bark, and a whip-snake, whose shelter had been rudely disturbed, reared itself upon its lithe body, and made a dart at

Barrington's arm that hung carelessly over the broken branch ; then glided swiftly past Honoria's feet into the underwood.

The girl started forward, and Barrington, uttering an exclamation of horror, made a step backward into the thicket—and disappeared.

There was a rustling among the leaves and grass, a rumbling as of falling stones—and then silence.

'Good God!' exclaimed Dyson, 'we have been sitting upon the very edge of the chasm.'

Honoria pushed her way through the thick brushwood, and parting the branches that screened the ravine, stood on its border, and looked down.

They had been walking down hill through the scrub, and the precipice at its foot was of no very alarming depth. Immediately below her, Barrington, perfectly sensible, was trying to lift himself from the stones upon which he had fallen.

'Do not be frightened,' he said with complete *sang froid*. 'The thing has bitten me, and I am afraid that my other arm is hurt a little—that is all'

He made another more vigorous effort to rise, which drew from his lips a sharp cry of pain, and his eyes closed as though he were fainting.

Forgetting Dyson, who was already half-way down the descent, Honoria flung herself from tree to tree, and dropped at Barrington's side.

Dyson pushed her away, and lifting the Englishman's left wrist, already visibly swollen, he drew his bowie-knife from his belt, and made several cross incisions on the two purple spots which marked where the snake's fangs had entered ; then he bound his handkerchief tightly as a ligature above the elbow.

'I have got some brandy in my flask ; it is under the quantong-tree. Try to rouse yourself, and suck the poison from your arm while I go and fetch it.'



Yes,' said Barrington, faintly. 'It is this other arm that is so confoundedly helpless.'

Suddenly Honoria bent forward, and before either of the men could say her nay, she had placed her young fresh lips to the bleeding wrist, and was drawing the poison from the wound. There was small danger in the act, yet it was one at which most young ladies would have hesitated. Neither then or afterwards could she account for the impulse which had prompted it. She went on sucking steadily till Dyson had returned with his flask, the contents of which he made the Englishman swallow.

'That will do,' he said gravely to Honoria, and fetched her a pannikin of clean water from the rivulet beside them. 'Rinse your mouth well out with this, and leave him to me. It was not for you to do such a thing. You are certain that there is no scratch upon your lips into which the poison could enter?'

She shook her head and did as he bade her, glad of the opportunity to turn away her head. She had caught a long passionate look from Barrington which, with her mind still full of the agitating remembrance of his words, dyed her face with blushes. These signs of embarrassment Dyson noted, though he appeared engrossed with the sufferer. He had continued to draw the poison from the snake's bite, and was now examining the other arm, which was clearly injured.

'I am afraid that it is broken,' he said; 'but that is of comparative unimportance, compared with the bite. You must have more brandy. I will run on towards the camp as quickly as possible, and you must follow with Miss Long-leaf. On no account give way to any feeling of stupor. I will coo-ée every now and then; but try to keep me in sight. Come—moments are valuable.'

The pain in both arms was acute. Barrington turned ghastly pale as he rose to his feet, and, with Dyson's assist-



ance, climbed the hill. Only iron resolution kept him from fainting outright. Dyson ran on ahead, and Honoria and her companion followed as speedily as they were able. The way was uneven, and Honoria's habit, that had become disarranged in her exertions, caught upon the rocks and twigs and impeded her steps. Several times she stumbled.

'I cannot offer you a hand now,' said Barrington. 'I reproach myself horribly upon your account. You will be worn out before we reach the camp. How can I thank you for being so brave—so devoted?'

'It was nothing!' she exclaimed harshly. 'I would have done the same for anyone.'

'No, you would not!' he cried fiercely. 'You know that you would not. Why do you say that *now*?'

He turned livid, and the drops of sweat gathered upon his forehead.

'You are in pain,' said Honoria.

'What does it matter about that? You could make my pain heaven if you chose. Say that you did it for *me*.'

She was silent.

'Say it,' he repeated insistently. 'Tell the truth.'

'If you are certain that it is the truth,' she replied, with a short laugh, 'where's the use of my repeating it?'

'You did it because you love me!' he cried passionately. 'You love me—I know it. Now I am so full of joy that I do not care what happens to me.'

'You make a great mistake,' she said coldly, yet faltering. 'I—I almost hate you sometimes.'

'Don't say that. It is not true. Why did Eleanor suck her husband's wound? Because she loved him better than her life. And you—you love me.'

'You are delirious. I ran no danger. Go on,' she added cruelly. 'You must not lag, or it will be too late for the brandy to do you any good.'

And they spoke no more till they had joined the Bassetts.

When they reached the camp, she left Barrington to the tender offices of the rest of the party, and stole away behind a rock, where she sat, with beating heart and heaving bosom, till she heard Dyson's voice calling for her.

By this time it was growing dusk.

'We have pulled the bone together as well as we were able,' said Dyson, cheerfully. 'Mr. Ferris is something of a surgeon. As regards the snake-bite, we have dosed him well with brandy. All danger is past. He will take no hurt. The virus is not so deadly at this time of year. You need not be anxious.'

'You fancy that I care specially because I sucked the poison!' cried Honoria, hysterically. 'Ah well! think what you please, what does it matter? I would have done the same for anyone. . . . I am tired—I feel unnerved—I wish that you would put me on my horse, and don't let anyone talk to me. I will never come out on an expedition like this again.'

He mounted her, and they joined the others, who were clustering round Barrington. The Englishman was pale, and had his arm in a sling, but he bravely professed perfect ability to guide himself. Where the narrow track permitted, Lord Dolph rode beside him, and led his horse. The evening was closing in, and they were obliged to make as brisk progress as Barrington's helpless condition would allow, in order that they might get out of the broken country before nightfall.

There was a glory of sunset upon the mountains. Every peak stood out distinctly against the yellow sky. At first the sharp crags were of the colour of gold, then they became magenta and crimson, and finally purple. Gradually the light faded out of the west, the moon rose, and one by one the stars came forth; Aldebaran and Orion shining high in

the blue vault overhead, and the Southern Cross rising clear above the horizon.

Cobra Ball rode before them, his light Crimean shirt looking ghostly through the trees. The night-birds sent forth their cries, and the native dogs howled in the scrub which they were skirting. The hum of busy life that had surrounded them during the day had ceased, all that remained were inarticulate murmurings in the bushes and the grass.

They were all very silent. Even Lady Dolph was weary and disinclined for conversation. Dyson only spoke to utter the merest commonplaces; and there was a choking sound in Honoria's throat when she answered, which warned him that she was on the verge of hysterical weeping.

Angela stood like a pale wraith in the verandah, watching for the return of the riders. She flew to Barrington's side, when, more dead than alive, he was lifted from his horse and conveyed to his bedroom.

She was left alone with him for a moment, while Mrs. Ferris went out to search for linen to bandage his arm.

Now, for the first time in their intercourse, a sense of shame and concealment overpowered her. Never before had she hesitated to meet his eyes frankly or to clasp his hand. Now she glanced at first guiltily towards the door, and then longingly at his unconscious face. She would have sunk to the earth could he have seen, or felt, the kisses which she reined upon his nerveless fingers.

'Oh my love, my love!' she murmured—'my life! I know—I know.'

She went out into the night, and lifted her flower-like face to the stars. It seemed to her that they only—so pure and so far—might witness her maiden ecstasy.

'Oh my life!' she murmured in passionate tones. 'I longed for something to worship. I was lonely—and now I have you. *You* are my sun. I must look towards you, or die.'

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LIPS THAT WERE NEAREST.

HONORIA passed a restless night. She had vivid dreams, during which she wandered in a mysterious forest that was infested by dread shapes, whose pursuit she tried in vain to flee. She awoke panting and oppressed by a terrible midnight dread. Barrington's eyes seemed to haunt the darkness. They were like evil things before which she cowered. Her limbs tingled: her head sickened and throbbed. In the distance a storm was brooding. The lightning flashed intermittently, and low growls of thunder sounded like supernatural warnings. The electrical condition of the atmosphere intensified her nervous excitement.

Sometimes she fancied that she heard Barrington groaning in his chamber, not far from her own. She felt almost impelled to rise and ask if he were in pain. The night seemed never-ending. All through the darkness she lay with her nerves in a state of tension, till morning broke and the lowing of the milkers, the stampede of horses to the yards, the cracking of stock-whips, and other sounds of station activity, seemed to mock at her nocturnal fears.

When she took her place at the breakfast-table, she was told by Lord Dolph, who, with Mr. Ferris, had paid occasional visits to Barrington's room, that the invalid had passed a feverish night, and that the broken limb still caused him considerable pain.

'I am sorry to say that we are obliged to leave him,' said Lord Dolph. 'We must start home this afternoon. It is no end of a bore, but Maggie and I are due in Leichardt's Town to-morrow, and cannot put off our journey. However,' he

added, 'I am certain that Barrington could not be in better hands, and that we need not concern ourselves upon his account.'

'I want to go to Leichardt's Town,' said Honoria, suddenly. 'Will you take me?'

'Delighted, I am sure,' replied Lord Dolph, looking dismayed, for he and Maggie had congratulated themselves upon the turn events were taking. 'But, I say, isn't it rather hard upon poor Barrington?'

'I shall be ready whenever you please, and am much obliged for your escort,' said Honoria, haughtily waving the innuendo. 'Mr. Ferris, will you give orders about my horse?'

Maddox appeared at breakfast in riding-gear, and announced his intention of starting for Barramunda immediately after breakfast. His eyes sought those of Honoria, but she looked defiantly before her. When the meal was over, the party separated, Lady Dolph accompanying her husband and Mr. Ferris to inspect a certain prize bull, and Mrs. Ferris departing to make jelly for the invalid. Honoria and Maddox were left alone on the verandah.

'Janie,' said he to the child, who came hanging on to her sister's skirts, 'go and find Aunt Penelope.'

'You must not order me,' said Janie, with dignity. 'Little mother, I'll be a good girl if you will let me stay with you. This is how little girls behave when they are good;' and she put on a demure expression, and seating herself upon a stool, twiddled her thumbs. 'I'll get "Robinson Crusoe," and stay very quiet.'

'I must say good-bye in a moment,' said Dyson. 'Have you really determined to go with the Bassetts to Leichardt's Town?'

'Yes; I shall not come back to Kooralbyn till the session is over.'

'I think that I understand the reason of your sudden

resolution,' he began, awkwardly. 'I admire the womanly delicacy which shrinks——'

'There is no need to mince the matter,' interrupted Honoria, switching off a hornet that buzzed about her head. 'Don't credit me with what I have not. I want to avoid Mr. Barrington—that is the truth. He is a strange man. He has a peculiar way of looking at me ; I am afraid of his eyes. I do not know myself when he is near me. I dread his gaining a mastery over me. . . . I have a thousand contradictory sensations. I half like, half detest him. I am a weak fool. . . . If I had a mother, I would go to her and ask her advice. But she could not guard me against myself. And I have no one—no one who has any sympathy with me. There is not a creature in the world who understands me—unless, indeed, it is Mr. Barrington himself.'

'Your father loves you deeply,' said Dyson, uttering one of those platitudes which occur to a good man when he is embarrassed. 'If you are in doubt, can you not confide in him?'

'Certainly not. He would beat with hammer and tongs at my destiny. He has only one idea, one hope for my future, and it will be disappointed. . . . And we have both a shrinking from gush. I feel myself becoming icy cold when it is borne in upon me that I ought to show some emotion. I can understand how much easier it is for a woman to bare her soul in the confessional than to make her pitiful confidences to the domestic tyrant with whom she must presently dine.'

Honoria laughed sarcastically, and Dyson marvelled at the change in her manner, from troubled appeal to cynical banter.

He began : 'Miss Longleat, I have heard upon good authority a report about Mr. Barrington, which I think you ought to know.'

‘Well!’ she said, folding her hands; ‘tell on.’

‘It is said that he was expelled from the Guards on account of some dishonourable action of which I do not know the details; and probably if I did, could not insult you by naming.’

‘There is no insult in truth,’ replied she, looking at him grandly; ‘it is when accusations are false that the “details” cannot be mentioned.’

‘He has the reputation of being a *roué*, a spendthrift, a fortune-hunter.’

‘Well!’ cried she, flaring round upon him at the last words; ‘and what of that? I know your authority. It is General Compton, who was worse than all this himself, and who has gone away from Leichardt’s Town, so that he cannot be called to account. I don’t care twopence for your authority. Do you think that I do not know when a man is in love with *myself*? Am I so old or so ugly that people should only wish to marry me for my money? I hate those cold, self-contained persons who are always attributing the worst of motives. As for that report about the Guards, I don’t believe a word of it.’

‘At least,’ said Maddox, ‘I have done my duty in warning you.’

‘You had better have been silent,’ she said sullenly. ‘I do not know you when you cry a man down behind his back: it is not like you;’ and she walked away.

‘Mr. Dyson,’ said Janie, looking up suddenly from her book, ‘was Robinson Crusoe a good man?’

‘Good enough, I dare say, Janie,’ said Dyson, shortly.

‘Then I shall see him in heaven,’ rejoined Janie, reflectively; ‘and I’m very glad of that, for I have got such a lot of questions to ask him. I wonder if Friday will be there too?’

‘Come, Janie,’ said Honoria, returning to where the child

sat. 'Little mother is going away to-day, and there are a great many things to be done. Good-bye, Mr. Maddox.'

She bowed loftily to Maddox, and taking the child's hand, left him.

Barrington recovered rapidly. The night after Honoria's departure with the Bassetts, he composed a careful message, which he begged Mrs. Ferris to deliver to her, and was surprised and mortified to find that she had gone.

'Surely it was a sudden move,' he ejaculated. 'She had made no immediate plans?'

'Bless us!' exclaimed Mrs. Ferris, 'you cannot count upon what Miss Longleat will do. She has been up and down like the wind these last three months. Now she will be in Leichardt's Town for the winter, and I am to follow before long with Janie. She is a kind-hearted girl is Honoria, and likes to give me a little pleasure. I am sure that she is fond of having me with her, and she knows that I enjoy a change from this dull place. So I leave Angela with her father, and they moon about together, and don't miss me. It cuts me to the heart, but it's a fact. They are happier without me.'

Though disappointed at first, Barrington was, upon consideration, not ill-pleased at Honoria's flight. It was a confession of weakness which made him feel almost certain of ultimate conquest. He determined to follow her as soon as his arm would allow him to travel. In the meantime his quarters were far from unpleasant.

Soon he was able to sit out in the garden, and before many days to resume his rambles with Angela. It was now that he began to observe a womanly consciousness in the young girl's face and manner which had never before been called into being. It flattered his vanity, and imparted a more piquant flavouring to her society. Averted glances,



blushes, and soft tremblings of the lips might be considered a just tribute to his influence, and more undoubtedly provocative of caresses ; and a kiss more or less, granted that it involved no unpleasant consequences of detection and explanation, seemed to Barrington but the natural result of their undivided companionship, their daily roamings in solitary places, and evening dalliance in the moonlit garden.

Sometimes Barrington fancied that Honoria's presence had acted as a blight upon the play of Angela's capricious spirits. With its withdrawal she bloomed into fuller life, and no longer appeared languid and ungenial. Her tendency to lonely musings was less marked ; her laughter sounded more frequently ; her eyes grew brighter, and her step more buoyant.

The days were becoming cooler, and the crisp autumnal weather infected Barrington, always peculiarly sensitive to atmospheric influences, with a feeling of exhilaration and dreamy enjoyment, in which all nature harmonised with his longings, and Angela's poetic grace supplied the feminine charm without which his life was incomplete.

“ Down in umbrageous retreats, chosen haunts by the shadow-flecked  
river,  
Drinking delights from the murmur of streams and the flutter of  
wings ;  
Streams as they murmur, bright wings as they flutter, green leaves  
as they quiver :  
All have strange music for *her* and a tale of invisible things ;”

quoted Barrington, from a poem that he had been reading aloud to Angela.

She was sitting in a careless attitude upon the bank of the creek, the windings of which they had followed a considerable distance above the station ; while Barrington lay upon the grass at her feet, his head resting upon his hand, and his eyes from between their half-closed lids upturned to hers in a gaze of indifferent admiration.

‘Ah, Angela!’ he said, ‘they are fools who tell us there is no poetry in an Australian forest. But a native singer must arise and coin new phrases in which to paint its beauties. Tinkling streams and verdant meadows and rustling leaves—all the hackneyed similes of the old-world poetasters—do not harmonise with the booming of the waterfalls, the moaning of the she-oaks, the hum of life in these wild glades. My dear, if time could be always summer, and life a long to-day, you and I might dwell happily enough among these mountains; but a man’s destiny lies in his wayward passions and hungering desires—he must follow where they lead him.’

‘You are not going away,’ murmured Angela. ‘Oh, stay!’ she added brokenly, extending her arms with innocent passion. ‘I will do anything you wish. . . . I—I must be near you. I want nothing except to be near you—to serve you—to hear you speak.’

Barrington raised himself and drew the girl gently towards him till her head rested upon his shoulder, and her slight form palpitated in his embrace.

‘My love!’ he whispered, ‘we are brother and sister, you and I. This is not parting, and wherever destiny may lead me, my heart will repose on you. Yet, dear child, do not dwell over-much on the thought of me. Your genius has glorious capabilities in which I may have no part—your life and mine must travel on separate lines—near, yet asunder. Compared with you I am old, world-worn and disappointed. Love me, my sweet one, as a sister, and I will be your loyal brother, holding none nearer or dearer than you.’

As he held her against his breast, he felt that she drew a deep long sigh, but she did not speak, nor did she withdraw herself from his arms.

They sat thus for several moments—blissful to Angela.

She had not comprehended the full significance of his words. That she might love him unrebuked seemed to her the fullness of joy. Marriage was too material a consummation of her dream to have entered into her childish imaginings. She asked nothing for the future. Love to her was but guileless ecstasy, in which, if there were no rebuff, there could be no shame.

To Barrington there was a very sensible delight in the pressure of her slight, yielding form ; but it was counter-balanced by a sudden dread, due to a rustling among the bushes on the opposite bank, lest an unseen eye should be watching and condemning.

He looked up and perceived a white face leering at him from between the branches of a tree that overhung the stream. It was a disagreeable countenance, mean and cruel, though not destitute of a certain intelligence of expression. Its owner had evidently occupied his post of observation for some considerable time, for now that concealment was unnecessary, he parted the foliage and revealed himself, comfortably ensconced in the angle of a forked limb, with a tattered volume in one hand, and a hunch of salt junk and damper in the other.

The eavesdropper uttered a loud, insulting laugh.

Barrington released Angela, bade her go homewards, and said that he would follow.

‘You mean hound!’ he cried, advancing to the edge of the creek ; ‘how dare you spy upon me in this way!’

‘I have as good a right to the river-bank as you,’ retorted the other. ‘For that matter, I was here before you. Come, I have done a bit of sweethearting in my time. I like to see a man making the most of his opportunities. They don’t present themselves too often. “*When Love is liberty, and Nature law,*” you know. You are fond of poetry. Is it not Byron who says :

“ And there were sighs, the deeper for suppression ;  
And stolen glances, sweeter for the theft ;  
And burning blushes . . . . . ” ?

‘ D—— your impudence ! ’ exclaimed Barrington, leaping the narrow strip of water that separated him from his adversary. ‘ Take that, and that ’—and he seized the student by the scruff of the neck, and being of powerful build, fairly lifted him from the ti-tree and kicked him into the bush. He then recrossed the creek and joined Angela, who, pale and frightened, was leaning against a tree, having witnessed the encounter, though she was too far off to have heard the rapid colloquy.

‘ I am afraid that you have been startled, ’ said Barrington, as he led her away. ‘ The man was impudent, and I chastised him. He had been spying upon us from the tree, and deserved his kicking. I don’t think that he will eavesdrop again in a hurry. Did you catch sight of his face ? Do you know who the creature is ? ’

‘ It was Sammy Deans, ’ replied Angela. ‘ He has just come out of prison. I don’t like him ; but he is very fond of Shakespeare, and reads sometimes with father. This is such a lonely place, father says, that one ought to encourage a love of art in the few who show any taste for it. Think of the joy it gives in solitude ! And I was sorry for poor Sammy when his little boy died—he loved him very much. ’

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE WORSHIP OF SHAKESPEARE.

THAT evening Barrington said to Mrs. Ferris : ‘ I had a disagreeable encounter this morning with a man called Deans. He made some insulting remarks when I was sitting by the

creek with Angela, and I gave him a severe kicking for his impudence. Do you know anything about the fellow?’

‘Don’t I, then!’ cried Mrs. Ferris grimly, folding her arms. ‘He is just the ruin of my old man; and I am sorry indeed to hear that he is about again. He sneaks up at night, and reads Shakespeare with my husband, and encourages him to drink toddy till I am well-nigh inclined to kick him off the premises myself. I have no patience with Anthony; but as you may have discovered by this time, Mr. Barrington, Mr. Ferris is not a man that will be dictated to by his wife.’

‘I am surprised that Mr. Ferris should countenance the visits of a cattle-stealer,’ said Barrington.

‘Oh, as to that, when Anthony takes a notion into his head, there’s no getting rid of it, especially if it has anything to do with art. Ye might as well try to pick out with your fingers a tick that has been burrowing in your flesh for a week. When Sammy was convicted, my old man and Mr. Longleat had words about the matter, and I never could rightly make out why Longleat caved in. That he did, is certain. There’s things we women don’t understand, and the friendship between my husband and Sammy Deans is one of them. . . . I’ll bet you what you like, Mr. Barrington, that they are bawling out Macbeth or Ophelia in the office at this very moment. I’d Ophelia him if I had the chance, old sinner that he is!’

Mrs. Ferris was shrewd in her conjectures. Surely there is no freemasonry so potent as that which binds the joint worshippers of Shakespeare and Bacchus. Anthony Ferris and Sammy Deans, seated in the office with a bottle of whisky between them and a volume of the immortal bard lying open on the table before them, were waxing both enthusiastic and confidential.

‘*Let me not live*

“After my flame lacks oil to be the snuff  
Of younger spirits, whose apprehensive senses  
All but new things disdain . . . .”

quoted Mr. Ferris, his eye rolling in fine frenzy, his shrivelled form expanding with an intellectual enjoyment that was figuratively and materially allied to intoxication. ‘That’s a fine passage! Lord, Lord!—what it is to be getting old! There’s a strange hebetude creeping over me. My nerves are dull; my faculties less firmly strung; nothing fires me as it used. That *timor mortis*, how terrible it is! A little more toddy, Sam. Here’s to your liberty once more. We have had a rare treat this evening. I have always said that there was not a man in Australia who knew or loved his Shakespeare better than you. Come, we won’t begin another play. Let us have a canto or two of “Don Juan”—something to heat the old blood and stir the flabby pulses. There’s no poet like Byron for making an old man feel the passions of youth.’

He rose, and selected a worn volume from the shelf above his head, where Rabelais and Sterne, Paul de Kock and Boccaccio, rested side by side with classic authors, and tomes upon ancient and modern art—the companions of his solitary hours. They read on for some time longer, till Mr. Ferris had induced that condition which can only be compared to the paradise of the opium-eater. Sammy Deans, as fervent an admirer of impassioned verse as his more cultivated patron, read and smoked by turns, a leer of enjoyment animating his pallid face. When the book was thrown aside there was a further recourse to the whisky-bottle. Deans drank sparingly, though he sedulously plied the old man’s glass till Mr. Ferris evinced a remarkable anxiety to express himself clearly, and a tendency to conviviality. Then Sammy Deans led him gradually on to discuss the Koorong gossip—Miss Longleat’s love affairs, the

chances of the Ministry, and thence drawing forth venomous allusions to the Premier. . . . Presently he made a feint of departure.

'Sit down, sit down,' cried Mr. Ferris; 'the night is young yet.'

'It has been a pleasant evening, Mr. Ferris,' said Sam, reseating himself, as it were, under protest. 'I appreciate it all the more, because I hain't been in over-fine company of late. God! I owe some one a long score for all those nights and days in Kooya Gaol. I am thinking, Mr. Ferris, that we had best say good-bye, and let Shakespeare go to the devil, for when Longleat comes to know of me hanging about the station o' nights, there'll be the —— of a wiggling for you.'

'Pooh! pooh!' said Mr. Ferris, 'you need not be under any apprehension, my Sammy; Longleat knows the length of his tether.'

'The length of his tether,' repeated Sam. 'You have said the same sort of thing before, Mr. Ferris; but I've always thought that you must be joking. It's the Premier that is boss, not you, and I shouldn't have thought that Longleat was the man to stand any humbug from his store-keeper.'

'Yah!' snarled Ferris. 'I'm his storekeeper—his servant—a creature fit only to be browbeaten and sneered at—I'm the dirt under his daughter's feet—I'm a poor devil without any spirit—that is true enough; but for all that, I am Longleat's master, and he knows it.'

'One 'ud think,' said Deans in an insinuating tone, 'that you'd got a secret about the Premier, that he was afraid of your telling—and that he gives you a good salary to keep your tongue quiet. That's the ticket—eh, Mr. Ferris?'

Mr. Ferris leaned back in his chair and chuckled, but did not reply. Sam cautiously replenished his patron's glass.

'All the same,' continued Sam, 'whatever your hold may be—if you've got one at all, which I have my reasons perhaps for doubting—I ain't agoin' on spending my evenings here unless I know for certain that I needn't be afraid of a blow-up.'

'Look here!' said Mr. Ferris, laying his lean hand upon Dean's arm. 'Do you see that iron safe yonder? There's no one got the key to that safe but me; and what do you think are piled up inside it, Sammy Deans? Why, manuscripts, my boy—poems—plays—the Lord knows what! . . . A hundred years hence, this old withered body will be a pinch of dust; but this,' touching his head, 'will be immortal—a second Shakespeare, Sammy Deans.'

'I dare say. Happen it may be so, Mr. Ferris,' said Sammy. 'I always thought you were a remarkable man, sir. It's genius that tells in the long-run. But this is not all you have got in the safe. Is it, Mr. Ferris?'

'There is something else in the safe—you are right, Sammy. There's a heap of old newspapers, and they tell a tale. By the Lord, if Middleton had got hold of those papers, Longleat would not be many days Premier of Leichardt's Land. . . . But you needn't think that I'm going to let you have a sight of them. I can see your delicate aim, Mr. Deans, but I'm not such an ass as to take the bread-and-butter out of my mouth for the sake of gratifying your revenge.'

'It seems to me, Mr. Ferris,' said Sammy, 'that if you had got such a hold as this over Longleat, you might have hindered him from prosecuting me, without its costing you much.'

'Sam, have you ever read that if a fool knows a secret he tells it because he is a fool; if a knave knows one, he tells it whenever it is his interest to do so. It wasn't my interest to tell my secret for you.'



'Happen it weren't, Mester Ferris,' said Sam doggedly, and relapsing, as was his wont in moments of inward excitement, into the northern vernacular of his youth—'happen it wur. You're a feyther, Mr. Ferris, and Longleat is a feyther, and I wur one too afore I wur sent to that d——d gaol. Lord! I knows the raw spot that touches up man or woman to the quick. 'Twere only yesterday that I wur standing by my little Joey's grave, and I says to myself, "Who has murdered the little chap, but them as sent his feyther to gaol?" . . . And happen he'd ha' died just the same, I'll never forgive them as held me back from kissing the little chap's face afore he went for his long journey—and he wur a-cryin' for me—Margaret said so. But that has nowt to do with you, Mr. Ferris. I've only said that happen it might ha' been for your interest to have kept Longleat from prosecuting me.'

'Well, well!' said Mr. Ferris, soothingly, 'I'm very sorry for your trouble, Deans, but the little boy's death could not have been helped, you know. I had my own daughter to think of—I've got to take her to Italy—to make her genius shine before the world. It is all for her sake that I am eating humble pie, and pocketing Longleat's money. It is not for my own.'

'Ay, ay,' said Sam, after a pause, during which he had put a curb upon his emotion, 'you love your daughter, Mr. Ferris. You'd be wild if there happened any harm to her. And Longleat—he's fond of his eldest one. A proud minx she is. Happen her father's heart 'ull ache for her some day. It's a queer thing is hating,' pursued Sam, reflectively. 'It takes you unawares like—just as does a pretty woman's face, only different. There's a chap here now—a tall, soldier-sort of fellow—that was dangling after your daughter at the creek to-day—'

Here Sam paused, and looked cunningly at his companion.

'Ah, yes!' replied Mr. Ferris. 'An Englishman doing "colonial experience" at Lord Dolph Bassett's. Much he will learn there! An ex-guardsman; not the stuff to make a stockrider. He has some idea of art, has Barrington; and the worst that I know of him is, that he is madly in love with Miss Longleat.'

'I'd as lief punch his-head as not,' said Sam. 'And you let your daughter go wandering with him by the creek, eh? And he has ideas upon art! In love with Miss Longleat, is he? I think I'll say good-night, Mr. Ferris. I'm much obliged to you for an entertaining evening. We'll see about repeating it by-and-by. I'm thinking of going down to Leichardt's Town for a day or two, but I'll see you again before long.'

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### MISS LONGLEAT AT THE BUNYAS.

UPON her return to Leichardt's Town, Miss Longleat plunged into a world of gaiety, and tried, as many others have done, to stifle melancholy by dissipation.

There were races upon the flats near Leichardt's Town, impromptu dances, tableaux vivants, and all the mild entertainments which heralded the session. The great balls would take place later. Honoria had tact and powers of organisation. Her beauty, her fascination, and social position combined to place her at the head of a little salon, and Miss Longleat's drawing-room became the centre of fashion and meeting-point for Ministerialists, and Anti-Railwayists whom there was some hope of conciliating. She seldom saw Dyson; but there were interesting strangers at that time in Leichardt's Town—a shrimpish sprig of nobility, and a

certain General Compton, who oscillated between New South Wales and Leichardt's Land, on pretence of inspecting the colonial defences. These were both worth the trouble of captivation. On the whole, she was tolerably well amused; and if, underlying her outward vivacity, there was fierce jealousy of Mrs. Vallancy, repulsion from her father, doubt of herself, and bitter regret, only defined to herself as dissatisfaction with life and with lovers in general, she was too proud to allow her sentiments to become public property.

During the period which had elapsed since the sudden dissolution of Parliament our little drama of love and politics had proceeded in the order of episodic development.

The flirtation between the Premier and Mrs. Vallancy had now become a favourite subject of covert gossip, though the Leichardtstonians, who were in the main a simple and easy-going clique, and not addicted to backbiting their neighbours, had not absolutely declined to accept the filial attitude which Mrs. Vallancy had assumed towards Mr. Longleat. She made capital of her delicate health, which had prevented her from accompanying her husband to Gundaroo, of her lonely position, and of the fatherly kindness of Mr. Longleat, whom she represented as an unappreciated Paladin, actuated by motives of the purest magnanimity.

But even the most gullible and charitably-disposed of communities has a little hesitation in regarding gifts of dresses and trinkets, perpetual attendance in public, and private visits late in the evening, combined with politic removal of an obnoxious husband, as nothing but the outcome of paternal affection; and Mrs. Ferris, who arrived in Leichardt's Town shortly after Barrington's departure from Kooralbyn, was not the first to stigmatise Mrs. Vallancy as a 'brazen hussy,' and to recommend the infusion 'of a little starch and blue into morals and manners.'

Upon her return to town painful rumours reached Miss

Longleat's ear, which galled her pride and wounded her sense of mastery. She had acted with small discretion, had spoken openly to her father, and, unchallenged, had volunteered her refusal to recognise Mrs. Vallancy or receive her at The Bunyas. The Premier, indeed, had no wish that there should be any intimacy between the two women. Passion had conquered his purer instincts, but he still felt that his daughter was a creature sacred and apart, and must not be contaminated by any doubtful society. Nevertheless her defiant attitude roused his worst anger, and there ensued a stormy scene which resulted in cold division and scornful indifference. Longleat was guilty and heartsore, Honoria distant and uncomprehending. Their mutual relations were painfully discordant.

Honoria had acted with the hot-headed indiscretion of youth when she had set herself in tactless opposition to her father. She had not calculated upon his bull-dog obstinacy that could never in a personal matter brook defeat. Had she realised the strong determining influence that, in spite of imperfect assimilation of temperament, she had hitherto exercised over his actions, she might perhaps have masked her suspicions under a compliant demeanour, and might, by the employment of a little feminine strategy, have won him from his enslaver. But she had not learned sufficient worldly wisdom to guide her through the emergency; and it was, under the circumstances, hardly surprising that Longleat should turn in disgust from a cheerless home and a frigid self-absorbed companion to the flattering atmosphere of Mrs. Vallancy's drawing-room.

In the old days when Honoria's will had, upon some comparatively insignificant matter, run counter to his own, he had merely smiled at the display of her 'spirit,' and had yielded under protest to that 'spice of the Tartar' which it pleased him to think she had inherited from himself. But

now the case had reference to a direct conflict for supremacy, and day by day the icy barrier that had risen between them made concession on either side impossible.

Upon one occasion, when he found her sitting alone in the drawing-room, looking softened and melancholy, he came up behind her, and with awkward demonstrativeness kissed her forehead, saying, in a voice choked by the struggle between pride and affection :

‘My gell! what is the use of going agen me like this? You cannot help being my flesh and my blood, and you cannot tear yourself asunder from me without pain to us both. Let’s make the best of each other; let’s open our hearts to one another, and pull together as far as we are able. There is something troubling you, apart from the cloud between us—that’s neither here nor there. I had never set my heart upon your cottoning with Constance Vallancy, though at one time I should have liked you to be friends. On the whole, I think I’m best pleased that you should keep apart. . . . I have taught you to set your head up high, and I am not blaming you for it. There’s things in which a man cannot expect his womenkind to sympathise—it is human nature, and there should be allowances made. I’m not angry that you hold yourself above me and her; but I’ll have no interference with my doings—mind that. I’ll not have you and that d——d old Penelope Ferris sitting in judgment upon me and my friends.’ He took a rapid stride across the room, during which she mentally revolted against his language; then he returned, and renewed his rough attempt at a caress. ‘Tell me what ails you,’ he said; ‘I know that something has been troubling you. Speak out to your old father. Is it sweethearts or what? Only let me know, and I’ll smooth it if I can.’

But Honoria’s sensibilities had been unpleasantly ruffled, and her cold reticence with her father would have allowed

her to suffer any pain rather than betray her heart's perplexities. How could she entrust such delicate and complex machinery into the conduct of hands so elephantine? She withdrew herself from the contact of his touch, and replied in those well-bred neutral tones which acted like a cold-water douche upon Longleat's effusiveness :

'There is nothing the matter with me, thank you.'

'Then we'll go apart,' said Longleat, turning abruptly away. 'That is what it comes to . . . . I have never asked much of you, Honoria, except that after I had worked hard for you and made a lady of you, you'd not hold yourself aloof from me and despise me. . . . I have been that proud of you, that I have feared to let you into the workings of my mind lest they should defile you. But there comes a day when a man's softer side gets the upper hand of him. He grows past the excitement of striving to distance his betters, and of making himself famous and respected ; and then there falls upon him a longing for love and sympathy and confidence ; and if they are not shown to him in his home, who is to blame him for seeking them elsewhere ?'

Honoria's lip trembled, but she did not reply ; and after casting upon her a long troubled look, her father left the room.

After this scene with his daughter, Longleat placed no further restraint upon his impulses. He was at this time living like a man in a dream. His passion for Mrs. Valancy had completely taken possession of the coarse side of his nature, as the craving for intoxicants seizes upon an intermittent drunkard, till the future becomes bounded by the gratification of his dominant desires.

On Sunday evening he went to church with Honoria, and found his wandering attention enchained by an exposition of the parable of Nathan, which, dealing in euphemistic language with the passionate proclivities of the Psalmist,

had the two-fold effect of rousing Longleat's interest and contempt. Was there not between David and himself the common bond of craving humanity?

When he reached home, he went straight to his study, and took from its shelf the great family Bible, wherein was recorded his second marriage and the birth of Janie. He deliberately turned over the leaves till his eyes fell upon the passages for which he sought. . . . The drops stood upon his red-veined forehead, and he clenched his hands as he read.

'After all,' he murmured, 'I am no worse than David. A man must be a man. It is human nature, and what is the use of fighting against it?'

After that he had no hesitation in clearly shaping his vague longings into conscious resolves, and chafed more and more at the ingenious simplicity with which Constance Vallancy met his advances. Yet, he felt certain that she understood him, and waited, in a state of feverish excitement, till the General Election should have decided his political fate, before he finally matured his designs.

Mrs. Vallancy showed considerable skill in parrying his addresses. Once confident of his subjugation, she contrived to steer clear of dangerous admissions and compromising demonstrations, accepting his presents under filial protest, and treating him with such an affectation of child-like candour, that he was by turns piqued and perplexed.

Upon the whole, it seemed as though the Premier's star was approaching what he would regard as its zenith, and that in the coming crisis ambition and love were both to be gratified.

Every day telegrams pouring in from different parts of the colony announced the success of the Ministerial faction. Middleton had had a hard fight for his seat, and though the Opposition was still paramount in the north, the eastern and

western electorates had mostly returned advocates for the railway.

His election for the constituency of Kooya was at this time assured to him. He was the hero of the hour, and notes of triumph trumpeted forth his every step. The only disagreeable sensation which he had suffered in the course of his much-applauded harangues was occasioned by the sight of Sammy Deans's malignant scowl, levelled at him from among the audience below the hustings. He shuddered, he knew not why, and his discomposure seemed to his excited fancy like a portent of evil.

The free selector had quitted Kooralbyn the day after his nocturnal interview with Mr. Ferris, and was prowling about the suburbs of Leichardt's Town.

After his lengthened visit to Kooralbyn, Barrington remained a week at Dyraaba, and then rode straight to the capital in pursuit of Miss Longleat. He put up at the Australasian, where Lord and Lady Dolph Bassett, who were down, as the latter expressed it, for a 'town lark,' also occupied rooms.

The day after his arrival he called at The Bunyas, and was received by Mrs. Ferris, who had taken up her temporary abode there. The old lady regretted Miss Longleat's absence, and upon her own responsibility invited him to dinner the next day. Early in the morning, however, he received a dainty note from Honoria, informing him that she was going to a concert, and begging him to postpone the engagement till the following evening.

A longing to see her possessed him. He went to the entertainment in attendance upon Lady Dolph, and had the satisfaction of watching Miss Longleat enter in state to the tune of 'God save the Queen,' in the wake of the Government House party; but as he had not been presented to



Lady Georgina Augmering, etiquette forbade him to approach. Honoria looked very lovely, and seemed encompassed by a certain pomp which was becoming to her style of beauty. Poor and petty as was the ceremonial, he could not but be struck by the grace with which she performed her part, and took pleasure in the somewhat premature reflection that there would be no need for him to shrink from introducing her as his wife to the noblest of his English acquaintances.

Before long she descried him, and bowed, whispering shortly afterwards to Lady Georgina Augmering beside whom she sat. Had he but known it, some subtle magnetism had, the moment she entered the building, assured her of his presence; and then all the slumbering forces—fear, repulsion, fascination—began to work again.

Towards the close of the performance Lord Dolph Bassett went to pay his respects to the viceregal party, and was requested to introduce his friend. It was found that the Governor's wife and Barrington had mutual connections in England—that his mother and she had been friends. To his chagrin she engrossed him completely till the concert was over, and only then was he able to exchange a word with Honoria. He offered her his arm, and they stood together for a moment behind the rest of the party waiting for the carriage to draw up. Suddenly he felt her arm quiver, and she wrenched it violently from within his.

'I wish that you would not look at me so,' she said in a low, forced voice. 'I am certain that you are trying to mesmerise me—and I will not have it—I will not.'

'You credit me with a power which I am quite unconscious of possessing,' said Barrington.

She laughed in an unsteady manner, and looked at him with an uncomfortable, half-averted glance.

'I was only joking; I have not forgotten my dream at

Kooralbyn. Well,' with a coquettish accent, 'I hope that Mrs. Ferris nursed you carefully.'

'You were very cruel to leave me the day after my accident.'

'I like to be cruel sometimes,' replied Honoria.

'You must be kind to me now,' said Barrington, with a slight emphasis on the 'must.' 'I have come to Leichardt's Town on purpose to be near you . . .'

The carriage drew up. Honoria got in ; both the ladies smiled and nodded adieu, and Barrington made his escape from the crowd round the theatre door.

The dinner-party at The Bunyas was a small affair, consisting only of the family circle, one of the Ministers and his wife and daughter, and a heavy young squatter who stuck to Miss Longleat like a limpet. Maddox was conspicuous by his absence. Miss Little, the Attorney-General's daughter, a pretty, porcelain-like figure, with irregular features, a golden fringe, and the self-complacent ease of a colonial belle, was apportioned to the Englishman. She had a great deal to say about herself and others, talked in a giggling monotone, and was evidently very much ashamed of her mother, who sat opposite—a stout, red-faced lady, with shiny black hair, and a reproachful expression, who, report stated, had once been a cook, and who consoled herself under the burden of her present greatness by a deep and abiding sense of injury.

Honoria sat at the foot of the table, supported by Mr. Little and her bucolic admirer. Thus, during the meal at least, Barrington found any but general conversation impracticable. The Premier was gruff and abstracted, furtively watching his daughter across the table, and scowling unpleasantly whenever Barrington addressed him. It was not his practice to conceal his antipathies under a mask of politeness ; and in this instance he had no hesitation in

making it apparent to the Englishman that his presence was not highly welcome.

But Mrs. Ferris's cackle was an effectual cover to any want of cordiality on the part of the host, and Barrington felt comforted by the old lady's reassuring whisper :

'Don't mind his looking cross ; it is only because he hates your breed.'

The talk during dinner was principally political, and bore reference to the elections, and to the conduct of Middleton and his 'venal and unpatriotic crew.' The Attorney-General delighted in high-sounding phrases. Honoria joined in the discussion with an affected air of interest, while Miss Little stifled sundry yawns, and remarked in a confidential gabble to her neighbour that she wished they'd look sharp about the railway and get it done, for she was close-up sick of hearing about it ; 'though to be sure,' she added naively, 'if it wasn't for the members Leichardt's Town would collapse altogether, for there's never anything going on except when Parliament is sitting. I do so love dancing, and parties, and dressing up,' she continued enthusiastically, after a brief pause, during which the Premier had sonorously aired his views upon the 'Dead-lock' system. 'We are going to give a dance next Friday. I'm sure I hope you'll come to it. I'll introduce you to ma by-and-by, and tell her to ask you, all proper—but if she forgets, mind you come just the same . . . Ma doesn't do much at our parties, except look after the lights and the supper. I hope you're fond of fun ; there will be lots soon, directly after the May ball—and it is always so much pleasanter when there are plenty of beaux. You have been staying at Kooralbyn, haven't you? Do you know that they call Honoria the "Enchantress of Kooralbyn?" It is because she always makes people fall in love with her—it must be nice to have everyone in love with one . . . Can you guess what I have been doing this afternoon? I've

been christening a steam launch : I called it the *Little Nell*—after myself, you know, turned upside down. Nell is my name ; and the idea just suits, for I always like to have somebody in tow. Do you think it is wicked for girls to flirt ? Honoria is a terrible flirt. There was actually one man who shot himself because she led him on, pretending she liked him, and then refused him. Is it true that Australian girls have ever so much better complexions than English ones ? and do you think them pretty—really ?’ and so on during dinner, *ad nauseam*.

Later on, other guests dropped in. It was one of Miss Longleat’s ‘evenings,’ which had become so deservedly popular. The Bassetts were there, and all the Ministers, except Maddox, with their wives—politicians young and old, some uncouth, newly fledged in the wilds, and trembling at their first entrance into their chief’s drawing-room ; others (and these were mostly townsmen) complacent, self-assertive, and voluble. There were ladies, fresh and youthful ; young gentlemen, distinguished by their regulation evening-costume, who were employed by day in the Government offices, and a sprinkling of more hirsute and less carefully attired bushmen.

Barrington observed that though there was in the assemblage a considerable diversity of dress and manners, there was a delightful unanimity in the homage that was tendered to the fair hostess. Honoria moved about, animated and chattering. She talked politics to the senators, and flirted with the young gentlemen—she was universally charming. Only Maddox, who had studied her carefully, might, had he been there, have detected an artificial ring in her voice.

The party was delightfully informal. There were cards for the elders, and there were music and conversation for those who were so inclined ; but it seemed to Barrington that everyone talked and no one listened. Some of the

young ladies walked out in the garden among the roses and the budding azaleas, but, in spite of his urgent request, Honoria refused to stir.

‘I will not go,’ she said curtly; ‘do not try to make me.’

He bowed silently, and left her.

But afterwards her eyes seemed to meet his and to say: ‘See, this is the petty society over which I am queen. Do not make my discontent deeper by contrasting it and me with the great world that you know.’

Only just before he left her did she grant him an opportunity of speaking to her.

‘I am told,’ he said, ‘that your father hates Englishmen.’

‘Well,’ she said, with the slightest movement of her shoulders, ‘what then?’

‘It is rather rough upon me, seeing that I am most anxious to cultivate his good opinion, that I should be handicapped so heavily. I can see that he has not taken to me.’

She was sitting at the piano, and went on playing for a few moments; then she said quietly:

‘I don’t suppose you care much. What is his opinion to you?’

‘Have you not been on the defensive long enough for one evening?’ asked Barrington, with an appealing look. ‘I have a great deal that I long to say to you.’

Her fingers wandered among dreamy chords, and their eyes met; her own drooped, and became divinely soft.

‘I won’t be on the defensive, as you call it, any longer,’ she murmured. ‘You may judge of my inconsistency,’ she added coquettishly, ‘if you choose to take your chance of finding me at home some morning soon. I am usually alone before luncheon, and then you may talk to me as confidentially as you please.’

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## FASCINATION.

It was one of the deepest of Longleat's sources of sorrow, that he could under no circumstances penetrate the barrier of reserve which held him apart from his daughter. This had always been the case ; and the older she grew, the more apparent became the want of unity between them. He had wished, and in his rough way had often tried, to ascertain the inner workings of her mind, but had always been rebuffed by her refined and distant superiority. Her grace and beauty, and a certain impalpable element of contempt which flavoured her intercourse with him, inspired him with a feeling of awe. He was constrained in her society, and in constant dread of committing solecisms. He was conscious that his antecedents were unworthy of her, and carefully avoided any allusion to his life prior to the bullock-driving period, of which necessity compelled him to make in some sort a virtue. There were certain particulars of his youthful career which he earnestly desired to shroud in oblivion : he would have endured any penalty rather than that they should come to Honoria's knowledge. Public disgrace would have been nothing to him in comparison with the smart of being humiliated in her eyes.

She was the core of his life. When he saw her unhappy he was pained, while he yet lacked the means of fathoming the source of her grief. Never had he felt so acutely the division between their souls as now that it was borne in upon him that she was miserable from some outside cause which he knew not.

He was the last person to whom she would have attributed

any degree of mental intuition ; but his sympathies, when they had reference to her, were keener than she supposed. If Barrington and Maddox—the former with triumph, the latter with melancholy chagrin—both observed the dawn of a new consciousness upon her face, as though some late experience had roused in her nature passionate sensibilities hitherto latent, her father was no less quick in remarking the change in her demeanour from scornful indifference to restless excitement or maidenly embarrassment.

He could only ascribe it to Barrington's influence ; and his dislike to the Englishman, as the representative of a race which he abhorred, was intensified by jealous resentment of his power of affecting Honoria's supremacy, which he, her father, had hitherto considered unassailable. At the same time, a shy dread of his daughter's displeasure, pride on her account, and a curious indefinable satisfaction in the attentions of a man whom all the ladies of Leichardt's Town were anxious to attract, prevented him from placing a veto upon Barrington's visits. It must also be stated that he had no idea of their frequency—a point upon which neither Mrs. Ferris nor Honoria was careful to enlighten him.

Honoria herself was perfectly conscious of the change which Barrington's influence had wrought in her, and, with a bewildered sense of danger, fought vainly against the spell under which she had fallen. Her moods became variable, and her manner alternated between fits of almost unnatural gaiety and silent depression.

Often she felt a gasping need to cry, though tears were an unfrequent outcome of her proud, susceptible disposition. For the first time in her life she experienced a craving for womanly sympathy ; but, wrapped up in herself, she had always held aloof from feminine companionship, despising alike the gushing confidences of her girlish associates and

the cackling advice which had been eagerly proffered by matrons, and so often rejected that it was now no longer tendered ; so that, with the exception of Mrs. Ferris, who was quite incapable of comprehending the nature of her needs, she had absolutely no woman friend to whom she could turn. She yearned for some deeper source of happiness than gratified vanity, and though she attributed the sadness which had fallen upon her to reaction after mental excitement, she knew well that it dated from the commencement of her acquaintance with Barrington.

It was he who had infused the melodramatic element into her life, and who had stimulated sensation so powerfully that there was no further cause for complaint of stagnation. Yet if he supplied all that her heart needed, why should the haunting strength of his eyes fill her with the dread of some undefined peril? Why, instead of the pure ecstasy of maidenhood of which she had dreamed, should this new love—if indeed it were love—be accompanied by thrills of excitement from which her better instincts recoiled?

Coincident with the extraordinary fascination that Barrington exercised over her, her relation with Dyson Maddox had assumed a new phase. His continued avoidance of her society afflicted her with sharp pain ; yet whereas formerly she would have brought all her coquettish wiles to bear upon his recapture, she was now timid and embarrassed in his presence, and shrank, with the maidenly reticence that is never found in a coquette, from allowing him to see how deeply she missed him.

She often told herself that he had ceased to care for her. He seldom visited at The Bunyas now, and when, at balls, he asked her to dance, addressed her with cold formality, which would have convinced her of his indifference did she not constantly find his eyes fixed upon her as she waltzed or talked with Barrington. She sometimes made a desperate



resolve to clear away the misconception between them by an impassioned appeal to his friendship ; but the intoxication produced by Barrington's voice and touch would again lull painful regret, and would plunge her into a state of ecstasy with which the thought of Dyson was wholly inconsistent.

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The winter season in Leichardt's Town does not usually begin till May, when the victims of tropical heat are sufficiently energised by westerly breezes and bracing weather to enter upon the labours of active enjoyment. This year, however, the rainfall had concentrated itself into the severe floods which, as has been seen, were mainly instrumental in the Premier's defeat. April set in fair and cool, and the abrupt dissolution of Parliament brought down many country gentlemen who would otherwise have remained on their stations, and who, in the intervals of electioneering, rushed eagerly into social dissipation as a counter-irritant to the political fever. In the middle of April Lady Georgina Augmering issued invitations for a ball, which it was supposed would open the winter's gaieties.

The night upon which it took place was clear and moonlit, and the ornamental lamps and Chinese lanterns with which the terraces and flower-beds were outlined seemed hardly necessary for purposes of illumination. The air was soft and balmy, and though not too warm for waltzing, it was yet sufficiently mild to allow delicate young ladies to wander, thinly shod and lightly cloaked, among the shaded walks which led towards the river.

Government House, a two-storied building, with stone piazzas and deep colonnades, seemed the haunt of ghost-like figures in white and black, which moved aimlessly among the arcades. Through the open doorways light streamed forth upon the gravel sweep, and within, a whirling kaleidoscope of dancers flitted across the polished floor of the

ball-room. Flags draped the centre archway and glossy palm-leaves festooned the musicians' gallery, from whence issued the dream-like strains of a valse by Labitsky. At one time, early in the evening, Honoria stood against a crimson curtain, framed in feathery fern fronds and silver pampas grass, idly watching the pretty scene before her and apparently taking no heed of the attentions of her cavalier, who was indeed the heavy young squatter whom Barrington had met at The Bunyas.

The Enchantress of Kooralbyn had the knack of assuming picturesque attitudes, and her sweeping bust and fine profile in relief against their brilliant background attracted many a glance of admiration. She was dressed in white, with a cluster of camellias at her bosom, and without ornaments, save for a golden serpent encrusted with diamonds that clasped her neck. Her glance, directed uneasily towards the doorway—she was expecting the arrival of Barrington—fell upon Dyson Maddox, who was watching her attentively.

The music ceased, and he made his way towards her, and asked her if she could spare him a quadrille.

'I have one left,' she said; 'it is the next, but I do not wish to dance it.'

'We will not do so,' said Maddox. 'I will find you a seat.'

She took his arm, and he led her out of the ball-room and into a fern-screened corner, where he placed her in an arm-chair.

There was a great gentleness in his manner, though he hardly spoke. Each seemed conscious and embarrassed. Dyson abstractedly fingered the leaves of a scented verbena, and she sat still, her eyes fixed upon the garden, silent while yet her heart yearned towards him. Suddenly she half-stretched forth her hand to him, but he turned to address her, and she drew it back.

'Miss Longleat,' he said, speaking with forced calm, 'I should like to say a word to you about what passed between us when I was last at Kooralbyn. I am almost sorry that I mentioned to you the reports that I had heard about Mr. Barrington. It is only right to tell you that I have tried to substantiate them, and that I cannot at this distance do so definitely. You may think that I had a selfish motive for speaking. I had none. I am glad that you should make your happiness in your own way—apart from mine.'

'What do you know about my happiness?' said Honoria, in a low tone.

'I watched you at Kooralbyn. I saw the maidenly struggle in your mind—it convinced me more strongly than words could have done. I believe that he is in earnest, that it is not your fortune which he seeks. He is passionately attached to you. I do not know why I should have doubted it. A man has instincts—like a woman; and mine made me dislike what I saw of Mr. Barrington. I distrusted him. It is possible that I may have wronged him. . . . And now I feel that by warning you I have made you unhappy. A woman who loves and doubts must be miserable indeed.'

'You think that I—that I love,' said Honoria, uttering the words with difficulty. 'You despise me!'

'How could a man despise a woman for being womanly? It is selfishness and coldness which breeds wretchedness and contempt. The love which would only gratify itself is false and narrowing. . . . I am disciplining my heart. Obedience to a higher law teaches distrust of motive. I, of all men, should have hesitated to condemn Mr. Barrington. Honoria, you are frank and innocent, and your best safeguard against wrong lies in yourself. The woman who loves and trusts is nobler than she who has a lukewarm faith and a selfish prudence. Let your heart expand. Love is what you need. Tell him what you have heard, and ask an ex-

planation. Rely upon your intuitive power of discerning truth to assure you how far you may receive it.'

'You mistake,' said Honoria in hurried tones, as though she had been laid under a stress to speak. 'You think me better than I am. I am not womanly. I shrink from myself. If I had a mother I should not dare to tell her how I feel—I should be ashamed. . . . Oh, if this is love, there is nothing noble in it—it is like witchcraft. It is as though something evil from which I cannot escape held me against myself. And when I am away from him, my heart aches with a longing which I cannot define; while when he is near me, I shrink from him and am afraid. I know not of what. Is this love?—help me—tell me what my feelings mean.'

'What they mean,' repeated Maddox, bitterly; 'can you doubt that you love him passionately? He has revealed to you your woman's nature. You never blushed so for me. . . . Oh, let us have no more of this!' he exclaimed, almost roughly; 'it is the refinement of cruelty to ask *me* to analyse your feelings. Forgive me, Honoria, if I leave you abruptly. I see Cathcart coming to claim you.'

He turned sharply away, brushing against Cathcart, who was advancing from the ball-room.

'You'll find Miss Longleat behind the screen of ferns yonder,' he said collectedly. 'I have had enough of this. There is work for me to do, and I am going back to the office.'

Cornelius wriggled into the vacant chair by Miss Longleat's side.

Presently he asked, fixing his melancholy little eyes upon her face:

'Should you like to dance?'

'What?' asked Honoria, wakened out of a dream.

'I dare say you have forgotten that you are engaged to

me for this waltz. I was trying to make up my mind whether I should remind you of your promise.'

'I would rather not dance,' said Honoria.

'Then we'll sit here,' rejoined Corny, placidly. 'I have been telling myself the whole evening that a man verging on forty should be thinking of better things than capering about on French chalk.'

Honoria gave her shoulders a little shake, and recklessly began to flirt.

'You have not been to see me since you came to town,' she said with her irresistible smile.

'The wisest people in the world are the fools who know themselves to be fools,' replied Corny, oracularly. 'I might become an unconscious fool in your society, so I avoid you. Tell me,' he added suddenly, 'have you forgotten my warning? Are you only experimentalising still, or have you gone further than you intended and raised the devil? I see, your face betrays you. You are in love at last. Well, I am sorry for old Dy——'

'You think this of me, too?' she murmured.

'You fancy that I am only an indifferent observer; but I have had my reasons for studying you. I know you well. Often I have watched you out of the corners of my eyes when you have seen me huddled up over a book. I did not think you capable of a grand passion. I do now. I respect you for it. Here comes Mr. Barrington. I must resign you.'

Barrington approached.

'Miss Longleat, this is our dance. I have arrived just in time to claim it.'

Honoria took his arm, and they entered the ball-room together.

Pre-eminence is the surest road to a woman's heart.

Honoria rather piqued herself upon the profession of com-

munistic principles, and did not hesitate to own herself the daughter of a man who had 'worked his way up;' but she retained the right of exclusiveness in the selection of her lovers. She was, in fact, remarkably susceptible to the current of refinement which she believed to be the attribute of the higher orders, and her vanity was agreeably flattered by the marked attentions of a man whose high birth and air of distinction made him the object of general comment.

As they waltzed together she felt a dreamy delight in yielding herself to his embrace. Her feet seemed winged, and the lights and figures appeared to float before her bewildered gaze. She was giddy and breathless when they paused near the doorway.

'There are a great many people walking in the garden,' said Barrington. 'Will you come out with me?'

They went on to the terrace. A stream of dancers followed them. He paraded the gravel with her impatiently for a few minutes, then led her into an unfrequented walk which wound through the shrubbery towards the river.

They passed a little summer-house which was dimly lighted with Chinese lanterns; he paused for a moment before it, and Honoria saw that it was occupied by a lady and gentleman. Her quick eyes recognised in a moment the Premier and Mrs. Vallancy. Her father's puffy red face was in close proximity with that of his companion, and his large hand clasped Mrs. Vallancy's small gloved fingers.

Honoria's soul swelled with indignation and disgust.

'Take me away!' she cried, and walked hurriedly on, turning presently into a side-path.

'I am sorry that accident should have turned our steps hither,' said Barrington. 'I am not surprised that you are angry and wounded. Your father's intimacy with Mrs. Vallancy is an insult to you.'

'Don't talk to me of it,' cried she, passionately. 'Every-

thing that I see and hear sickens me. No one seems to care what I feel.'

'You are in a strange, lonely position,' Barrington said, in a tone of deep tenderness. 'Your father's house is no home for you. You must marry and leave it. You were not meant to lead a cramped existence in Australia,' he went on. 'Your gifts are wasted here—your beauty—your rich capacity for enjoyment. You should live in England. All that society and art can furnish should be placed within your reach. . . . And there is more. I can give you the key to fulness of life. Honoria, you are ready for love, and it is waiting at your feet. Yield yourself to me—your unrest will become tranquillity—your dissatisfaction exquisite joy. One instant—only look into my eyes—only let me touch your lips, and you can have no doubts.'

He stooped to embrace her, but she moved a step or two away from him.

'You ought not to speak to me in this way,' she said excitedly. 'I don't know what to think. I cannot trust my feelings. I do not know whether I love you or not. All I am certain of is that since I have known you I have been miserable. I feel sometimes as though I hated you.'

'Darling,' murmured Barrington, 'your conventional instinct rebels against the affinity which from the first has linked us together. You are startled by the discovery of a force which you do not understand. No other man can influence you as I can and do. Hitherto, all your life, your feelings, your interests, have been commonplace. You have never known passion. This is passion, and it alarms you.'

'Stop!' cried Honoria, in a bewildered manner; 'I cannot think. I *must* think. Let me go back. Don't come near me any more this evening. Do you hear? Don't say anything more. Don't look at me!'

Barrington kissed her hand.

'I obey,' he whispered : then silently led her back to the house. 'I will come to you to-morrow,' was all he said, as he placed her in a chair beside Mrs. Ferris.

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CHAPTER XXV.

'YOU SHALL BE MY FAITH.'

HONORIA felt, when she laid her head upon her pillow that night, or rather the next morning, that she had irrevocably committed herself. It was true that she had not in so many words consented to become Barrington's wife, but she knew that when he should come to her upon the morrow she would have no power to withstand him.

Did she wish to do so? She could hardly tell. Like her father, she had a vague belief in the power of Destiny. It was her fate to be controlled by this man; and after all, she argued, what could there be more in accordance with her yearnings for melodramatic emotion than this complete surrender of her will to an influence which was half fascination, half repulsion?

Allied to considerable strength, there was in Honoria's nature a flaccid liability to domination. As long as she had remained in the shallows, she had been strong and self-confident; now that she had dived into deep waters, she was helpless as a child. Barrington had made her his slave. It struck her excited fancy again, as it had done several times before, that she might be the victim of a mesmeric experiment.

Was it possible that he could, unconsciously to herself, have magnetised her into this condition of trembling depen-



dency upon his words and looks? Was this the explanation of these fits of heat and cold—this state of dreamy unreality and frightened expectancy? Could this magic spell, that seemed to deepen every day, be due to an occult influence which, when it faded with familiarity, would leave but repugnance or limp subservience? Thought of in the darkness, her loneliness seemed unbearable. There was no one who understood her. Mrs. Ferris was incapable of comprehending her state of mind, and was, moreover, devoted to Barrington. She could not take her father into her confidence. In spite of her ardent impressionability, there was in her nature a strong maidenly instinct which made her recoil from the breath of impurity; and the sight of Longleat and Mrs. Vallancy in the arbour, the hints and rumours which she had heard, had filled her soul with disgust at the moral atmosphere which encompassed her.

In her longing for sympathy she clung to the thought of Maddox. His opinion was like a subtle vapour, permeating every method of analysis which she brought to bear upon her relations with Barrington; his evident conviction of her love acting as an argument in the Englishman's favour.

'It is impossible that a woman can love two men at the same time,' she said aloud, while she tossed restlessly upon her pillow. Her eyes piercing the darkness saw only the face of her enslaver, like a magic-lantern illumination on the wall opposite—wherever she looked his gaze followed her. Then she fell into a fit of weeping, and at last dropped into a troubled slumber which lasted till long after the house was astir, and the Premier gone to the Treasury.

When Honoria entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Ferris was reading a letter which the morning post had brought her, while little Janie played at her feet.

'Dear heart!' said the old lady, looking up with a wrinkled brow and expression of perplexity, 'I wish that I could get

a *finished* feeling. Just as I have bought a new black silk dress, and am beginning to enjoy myself, that old man of mine writes to tell me that Angela is ailing—I wish I knew whether I ought to go back. Now, do you think, Honoria, that the child is really ill, or that it is only one of Anthony's whimsies? Not but what I'd be glad to go if they really wanted me, but it is ten to one that Angela will not even eat a bit of jelly of my making. Never was there such a faddish creature! Honoria, my child, I'd have been a happy woman if I had had a son, and I am sure it is a credit to myself, with all the reproaches that have been thrown at me, that I have kept as straight as I have done. Now, did you notice Mrs. Vallancy last night—and did you remark the locket she was wearing round her neck? I'll swear upon my oath that I saw it in Salomons' shop-window last week, and we all guess who bought it of him.'

'Hush!' said Honoria. 'You forget the child!'

'Little mother,' cried Janie. 'Here is Mr. Maddox.'

Honoria rose confusedly as Dyson entered. He shook hands with her first, then with Mrs. Ferris, who began volubly to recount her difficulties.

'I came to ask if I could do anything for you up Koorong way,' he said. 'I will ride over to Kooralbyn if you wish it, and bring you back news of Angela that will set your mind at rest.'

'Are you going away?' asked Honoria, with a feeling of despair.

'For a few days only,' he replied. 'I cannot be spared for longer from the office.'

Honoria took up a strip of embroidery from the table, and put in a few rapid stitches. Janie's unchildlike eyes regarded her attentively.

'I am so dull,' said the little creature, after a reflective pause. 'I like Kooralbyn best—father is always away here.'

and little mother never takes me on her back, or plays with me as she used.'

'Bless us!' cried Mrs. Ferris; 'when you are as old as Honoria, you will know that girls have something better to think of than amusing little children. Are you dull? Come, and I will build you a house.'

All this time Honoria's lips were trembling. Suddenly she put down her work, and looked at Dyson. Mrs. Ferris was searching with Janie for a box of bricks, and Honoria spoke under cover of the confusion.

'When you come back again everything may be different with me.'

'You will have got your wish,' said Dyson. 'You are in love at last, like the women in novels. You are taken out of your petty world . . . I am glad of that.'

'You are certain that I am in love, then?' she asked.

A red flush passed over Dyson's face.

'You persist in torturing me . . . Have I not told you that I believe so?'

Honoria folded her hands with a gesture of final acceptance.

'Do you think that I am happy?'

'I don't understand that passionate kind of love which makes a person miserable and joyful by turns. I suppose that in some people it is natural. A woman like you cannot do things by halves.'

'You are right,' she answered. 'You have learned to understand me at last. It is my misfortune that I cannot be content with tame sensations. I want what I have not got, and when it is within my reach, I hate it. It is as Mr. Cathcart said—I have raised the devil. I wish now that I could make myself dull and commonplace, but it is of no use wishing. Can you not see? I am like two creatures. I am being pulled in opposite directions . . .'

As Honoria spoke, the drawing-room door opened softly, and Barrington was admitted. He went up to Miss Longleat, and took her hand with an air of proprietary interest that was not lost upon Dyson; asked Mrs. Ferris whether she had recovered from the fatigues of the ball, kissed Janie, and, turning to Dyson, suavely commented upon his early departure from Government House the evening before. His entrance seemed to bring another atmosphere into the room, and produced a marked effect upon Honoria. Her pale cheeks flushed, and she talked rapidly and with feverish vivacity.

Dyson took up his hat and bade her good-bye.

'Have you any commission that I can execute at Kooralbyn?' he asked.

'None—unless you can bring me a whiff of mountain air. Oh! I feel stifled here. You must come back in time for the Frazers' party. It is the "Nunc Dimittis" of the Opposition.'

'I suppose that you have heard this morning's news,' said Barrington to Honoria. 'You were anxious about the Wogong election. Mr. Griesbach has been returned.'

'Another of our side!' cried Miss Longleat, with an assumed air of triumphant interest. 'But I am too confident of victory to be keenly excited. Leichardt's Land *must* see the advantages of the railway.'

'We have rather a personal than a political majority. The general feeling is more with your father as a conquering and powerful leader than with his policy,' said Dyson, soberly. 'Good-bye, Mrs. Ferris. I will ride over to Kooralbyn, and I hope that I may bring you back good news.'

Honoria nodded as he departed, meeting his eyes with a bright, wide-open gaze that implied utter recklessness. When he was gone, Mrs. Ferris, not without intent, dis-

covered that she had some shopping to do, and led Janie away with her, and Honoria and Barrington were left alone.

The windows leading to the garden were thrown open. The day was bright and cloudless, the horizon crisp and sharp; the sun shone upon the beds of azaleas and camellias, and the scent of mignonette filled the room. The air was balmy. Nevertheless there was a wood fire burning upon the hearth, and Honoria, whose luxuriant nature basked in warmth, moved towards it, and stood with one arm resting upon the mantelpiece and her eyes downcast upon the carpet.

Her attitude called attention to the rounded outlines of her figure and the long curves of her shoulders and bust. She wore a tightly-fitting dress of black, chosen with a vague reference to Barrington's visit. Her fair hair was negligently coiled after the fashion which becomes a Greek contour, and she had twisted a black lace scarf around her throat, above which her creamy complexion arose in mellow contrast. Her vigils had cast soft shadows beneath her eyes, and there were lines of tremulous sensibility about her lips. Her whole pose was unconsciously expectant and inviting. Barrington's heart beat quickly, and advancing before she was aware of his intention, he threw his arm around her and drew her close to him, pressing his lips passionately to her own.

A dream-like sense of intoxication overpowered Honoria. The air and the room became billowy, and a hot, fierce hand seemed to grip her throat. Her form swayed and her bosom palpitated in gentle undulations. Whatever the spell might be, whether spiritual or otherwise, she had completely succumbed to it.

It was abruptly broken by a brief searching glance which a gentleman crossing the lawn directed towards the pair in the drawing-room. Honoria recognised Dyson. He had

forgotten an important official document which he had brought that morning for the Premier's consideration, and had returned by the side-entrance to place it upon the table in Mr. Longleat's study. Honoria wrenched herself from the embrace of her lover, and darted to the window, whence she could see Dyson emerge from the wing appropriated to her father's use, pass over the lawn, and make his exit by a wicket-gate which communicated with the public gardens.

She returned to the fireplace, where Barrington stood attentively studying a photograph of herself that lay upon the mantelshelf.

'Did anything alarm you?' he asked.

'I—no—yes,' stammered Honoria; then flamed out in indignant rebuke, 'Why did you do that? I gave you no right to treat me so.'

'I was brusque, daring,' pleaded Barrington. '*This*,' he added, pointing to her reflection in the pier-glass, 'must be my justification.'

'You make me hate myself,' she went on in an agitated manner. 'A horrible feeling has come over me. . . . All the time I am struggling against you. . . . You do me nothing but harm. . . . I used to think that no one would ever dare to. . . . Oh!' she cried, covering her blushing face with her hands, 'when I am with you I have no pride, I am made to feel sunk in humiliation.'

'Do you not think that there is glory in self-surrender? Darling!' said Barrington, in eager tones. 'Be true to yourself. Why should you rebel against what is a woman's sweetest destiny? Do you not believe that I honour you? that I love you with every pulse of my being? How can I convince you that you would be happy as my wife? . . . Marriage, in which there would be no ruffling of your delicate sensibilities, no jarring against your prejudices, in which your whole nature would expand under the influence of

love, would perfect your being, and make your joy. . . . This is what I offer you. . . . It is I who have lifted you out of your tame, colourless existence into life. . . . You are dazzled. You dare not trust your senses, which would be your surest guide to happiness.'

'You say that you understand me,' said Honoria, speaking almost in a whisper, and looking earnestly into his face. 'I must believe you, for I do not understand myself. At one time I thought that I should like best to rule, and that other people should reflect my moods. I wanted everyone to think and feel as I wished. . . . And then that seemed cold, and I longed for a fuller life—for sympathy and emotion. And you came. . . . I wanted to have great passions, like the people in books—to live instead of to stagnate; and yet all the time I meant to be supreme. That is what I am not. I am a slave. It is as though I were being drawn by a bad spirit whither I do not wish to go. If I loved you should I be afraid of you? . . . And I struggle, and it is of no use; nothing is of any use. . . . At night, I awaken all quivering and frightened. I awaken fancying that you have touched me in the darkness. When I am with you I am excited in a dreamy, horrible way, and afterwards I shudder. It is as though I had been standing on the edge of a precipice and had turned giddy. If you understand me, tell me why all this is?'

'In two words,' replied Barrington—'*you love.*'

'Do I love?' cried Honoria, almost wildly. 'I sometimes wonder whom.'

'You love *me*,' said Barrington, drawing her again to him, and holding her face almost on a level with his own, so that she was compelled to meet his look. 'It is my happiness to believe that it is so. I read your confession in your eyes, on your lips, in the tones of your voice, in the beating of your heart. You love *me*. . . .'

Honoria's bosom heaved and her form became pliant as a reed in his grasp. The dread passed from her face, her eyes swam with tenderness, and her lips parted in a smile, half dreamy, half coquettish.

'If love is surrender,' she murmured, 'then I love. I will have no will. *You* shall be my will. *You* shall be my faith.'

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### BARRINGTON A REJECTED SUITOR.

DURING the interview which followed, and which was fraught with the witchery of repulsion and intoxication, Barrington promised that he would at once inform Mr. Longleat of what had taken place. Later in the day he called at the Treasury, and asked if the Premier would favour him with a private interview.

He was admitted. Mr. Longleat, absorbed in calculations, was seated before a large table, which was strewn with official documents, and flanked by pigeon-holes stuffed with papers. He looked up as Barrington entered, curtly shook hands, and motioned him to a seat. In a few well-chosen words he told the result of his proposal to Honoria, and formally asked Mr. Longleat's consent to their engagement.

The Premier rose, and stood with his back to the fireplace, and his thumbs thrust into the armholes of his waistcoat, as was his custom when he was obstinate or annoyed.

'Mr. Barrington,' said he, 'it is just as well that you and I should understand each other without any more to do.'

'Certainly,' replied Barrington, in those well-bred neutral tones which were specially irritative to Mr. Longleat's temper. 'Your daughter has consented to become my



wife. Of course I am anxious that you should approve of her choice.'

Longleat regarded him with a critical look of dislike, and, restraining by an effort any violent expression of his feelings, said :

'You are an Englishman—a man of good family—a younger son with wealthy relations. I have some little knowledge of your class, and I tell you frankly that I detest it.'

'I am sorry for that, Mr. Longleat,' replied Barrington ; 'but it is hardly fair that a man should be held responsible for the position of his parents.'

'You think no small beer of yourself,' continued Longleat, 'especially where women are concerned. Now, will you be good enough to tell me what your income is?'

Barrington explained that his brother made him an allowance of £150 per annum, the capital equivalent to which he would receive when he had decided to invest in Australia.

'A matter of £4000, putting it roughly at four per cent.,' said Mr. Longleat. 'Have you expectations of further property?'

'None that I am aware of,' answered Barrington. 'I may mention that after my brother and his two sons, I am heir to the family title and estate ; but my succession is a very remote contingency.'

'Pshaw !' exclaimed Longleat. 'You are doubtless aware that when my daughter is twenty-one she will, independently of me, be a rich woman. This fact has probably entered into your calculation. Now, setting aside everything else, is it likely that I shall consent to her marriage with a needy sprig of nobility? Perhaps you imagine you are doing her an honour?'

'On the contrary, I am honoured by Miss Longleat's

preference. I hope that you acquit me of mercenary motives?’

‘Damn it!’ cried Mr. Longleat, furiously, ‘I am not going to pay my daughter the ill compliment of supposing that you are only seeking her for her money. Don’t I know that she is fit to be a duchess, if there is any glory in that? You are a conceited cuss, and you have contrived to establish an abominable influence over her. She has never been the same since you gained her ear. She has looked queer and out of sorts, and has held herself aloof from me. Who is to blame for that if it is not you? Am I likely to regard you with any more favour for coming between my daughter and me?’

‘Are you certain that it is I who have come between you and your daughter?’ asked Barrington, in a meaning tone.

‘Do you want to insult me?’ cried Longleat, growing very red. ‘I say that it is you who have poisoned her mind. I know all about you. You were kicked out of the Guards. You have got into rows about women; you have squandered your fortune, and have come out to Australia to be white-washed. You brag about your relations in England, and trade upon your good looks. If you think for a moment that you are going to marry my daughter you are very much mistaken.’

‘Mr. Longleat,’ said Barrington, ‘if any man but you had insulted me he would have had to answer for it. I suppose that Miss Longleat will have a voice in the matter. What you say is perfectly untrue. I will put you in the way of obtaining any information that you may desire as to my former life and my objects in coming out to Australia. Any reasonable objection that you may urge I will answer frankly.’

‘There is nothing more to be said,’ returned Longleat, doggedly; ‘I have other views for my daughter.’

‘I think that before dismissing me in this summary fashion, you owe me the courtesy of an explanation.’

'I have other views for my daughter,' repeated Longleat. 'It is not my intention that she shall marry an Englishman. . . . I have no objection to her seeing all that is to be seen in Europe. She shall have everything that money can give her—that's what I've worked for ; but she shall marry as I have marked out. She is an Australian, and her money belongs to Australia. I have educated her to hold her head among the highest in the colonies, and here she shall stop, and her money too. I am not going to have her play second-fiddle, and be looked down upon because her father was a bullock-driver. Out here, I am Longleat of Kooralbyn, Premier of Leichardt's Land, and she is my daughter ; that is the top of the tree to us. Her husband shall be an Australian, who will take my name and carry on my work ; so that when I am dead and gone, Longleat's policy shall still be known the length and breadth of the land. The Premier's daughter—the Premier's wife—that's what I mean her to be, and nothing else.'

'You must be aware, Mr. Longleat,' said Barrington, 'that your objections are mere prejudices. Your strong affection for your daughter will surely never suffer them to override her happiness. I am willing to agree to any stipulation that you may make as to her residence in Australia.'

'Ay, ay ! I have no doubt,' replied the Premier, sarcastically ; 'but that has nothing to do with the matter. I object to you personally. I have never cottoned to you from the moment I set eyes upon you. If I had not been a besotted fool, I should have forbidden you my house long ago. I caution you now not to set foot within my doors, or you'll be kicked out of them. I don't understand your fine English manners, but it seems to me that a man has a right to behave as he pleases inside his own walls, and I beg you'll keep out of mine. I distinctly decline to entertain your proposal.'

'I regret your determination,' said Barrington, with difficulty keeping his temper; 'but till Miss Longleat herself dismisses me I shall consider myself engaged to her. Of course I shall not enter your house against your wishes.'

'You may consider yourself what you please,' said Longleat. 'It is my business to prevent my daughter from making a fool of herself. Keep your mind easy, Mr. Barrington; she will never go agen me.'

'We shall see,' said Barrington.

'Very well! and as we have both made our intentions clear, and I have a good deal of public business on hand, you'll excuse me if I say good afternoon.'

The Premier seated himself again at his table, and touched the gong to summon his clerk.

Barrington took up his hat and withdrew, speculating as he left the Treasury what would be the immediate result of the interview.

Honorina had told him the family plans for the day. He knew that she was to drive with Lady Georgina Augmering in the afternoon; that there was a meeting of the Executive; that the Premier was to attend a political banquet; and that she had asked some gentlemen to dine at The Bunyas. He himself had been one of those invited, but it was now of course impossible for him to be present. Upon the whole, he did not think it probable that Mr. Longleat would have an opportunity of speaking to his daughter that day, and resolved to write to her in such terms that her promise would be clinched before there was any chance of its being broken.

But Barrington hardly estimated the extent of his power, or the obstinacy of Honorina's disposition. Susceptible as she was to emotional influences, she had a strong contempt for legitimate authority, and was as iron when bidden to

yield a jot of her supremacy. Thus it needed but the breath of opposition to fan her fascination for Barrington into a violent flame.

Longleat felt ill at ease after his dismissal of Barrington. At half-past three the Executive Council met, and even the Governor rallied him upon his air of heavy abstraction. When it was over, instead of retiring to his office, or crossing the river to see Mrs. Vallancy, as was his wont, he betook himself to his own home, where he found Mrs. Ferris and his daughter in close conversation.

In truth, they had been talking about Barrington's visit and its consequences. The old lady was a fervent admirer of the Englishman, and her warm praise stimulated the confidence which in her woman-like longing for sympathy it was impossible for Honoria to withhold.

They both started when the Premier entered. He looked flushed but resolute.

'Honoria,' he said, 'can you come with me into the study? I want to speak to you.'

'Lady Georgina will call for me in a quarter of an hour,' replied Honoria, coldly.

'Come!' he said imperiously, and she followed him to the back room looking out upon the lawn, filled with Hansard's Parliamentary papers and standard tomes, where the Premier spent long hours in studying political precedents, and the principles of representative government; in battling, too, with the difficulties of grammar and classic authors; in lonely brooding and painful excitement.

He went up to the fireplace, where a log was burning, and stood with his back to the flame. His daughter faced him.

'Honie,' he said with great gentleness, taking her hands, 'my gell, you must gev it up!'

She looked at him full with her clear eyes, while her lips tightened ever so slightly, but she made no answer.

'You must gev it up,' repeated Longleat. 'He is not the kind for you. A needy swell, who has shaved too close to the wind at home, and who is caught by your pretty face and the chink of your money. A man who'll think that he is doing you an honour maybe by marrying you; who'll love you for a year, then turn from you, and perhaps ill-use you. Oh, I know his breed.'

'He is a gentleman!' said Honoria, proudly.

'What has that to do with it? Is not——'

He paused, and grew redder. It had been on his lips to say, 'Is not Connie Vallancy's husband a gentleman?' And perhaps Honoria guessed at the unfinished sentence, for she stiffened herself, and stood erect.

He went on hurriedly blurting out his sentences.

'Take my word for it. I know the meanness, the cruelty of the race—how they look upon all innocent creatures, not noble like themselves, as born only for the gratification of their cowardly pleasures. You are not the woman to be despised, perhaps affronted. I had rather know you were dead outright than see you suffer the lingering torture that a marriage with that man would be to you. Have I not seen something of these d——d aristocrats? They think that God created the world, and all the live things on it, for their profit and pleasure. They believe in their sacred prerogative to make laws and crush the people. They've got a kind of hard supercilious pride that holds them together and gives them the notion that outside their own order all mankind is so much dirt. Arrogance and cruelty are bred in their bones and flesh. They are the curse of England. It is only in a new country like this, where the forest is free, and God is for each and all, that there is any liberty for man or beast. Do you imagine that you, who have been worshipped like a queen, could endure to eat humble-pie before a set of simpering ladies who would merely tolerate you for

your riches, or more likely flout you because your father had been a bullock-driver? You are an Australian—your money is Australian. Never forget that it came from old Jem Bagot, a ticket-of-leave man, and your father's pal in the old days when he drove his team to Kooya, and grudged himself a pipe or a nobbler that he might lay by to make a lady of you. . . .'

'Papa!' said Honoria, her face fearlessly turned towards him, 'I understand your feelings, but I cannot sympathise with them. My money may be Australian, but I am not. I have not an ounce of genuine Australian blood in my veins. . . . I cannot get up an enthusiasm about wool, and tallow, frozen meat, intercolonial jealousy, and all that cant which people talk about this glorious country of the future, which seems to me like the boasting of a silly child who fancies that the great world is interested in its capers. I care only for my native land because it is the scene of my life—I would change it if I could. I care only for politics because they are your triumph or defeat. All my yearnings are after England, and English people. Like must to like——'

Longleat dropped her hands helplessly.

'*Like must to like,*' he repeated. 'You are wanting me to understand that the bond of flesh is all that binds us together. Our minds don't march to the same tune. You are ready to pick a quarrel with Fate for making you the daughter of an Australian bullock-driver, instead of the child of an English nobleman—as well one as the other! You are not content to take your life as God gave it you, and be thankful. What have my love and my work done for you, except to drive you from me? There's nothing to hold us to each other except the fact that it is I who begot you, and not another. When your own fortune comes to you—Jem Bagot's money—you'll be independent of your father.'

'Father,' said Honoria, 'how hard you are! How cruel!' The words were passionate, but the tone was merely incisive. 'What have I done that you should speak to me so? I have never cared about the money that was left me. I have never wanted it, or thought of being independent of you. I have wished to be a dutiful daughter, but there are some matters which a girl must decide for herself. . . . I have never known exactly what you wanted me to be—you seemed always pleased with me—it is only lately that you have been dissatisfied. Is it my fault that I have feelings and longings and thoughts of life different from yours?'

'No, it is not your fault, Honie,' said Longleat, quietly. 'You have soared above me, and you are not to be blamed for using your wings. I shouldn't have let them grow—I should have kept you down—that is what I ought to have done, and then you would not have despised me.'

'Papa,' Honoria went on, speaking very gently, and not realising how every word that she uttered stabbed him, 'I do not wish you to interpret my words in such a manner that you can suspect me of meaning any disrespect to you. What I want to convey to you is this, that you are not able to understand Mr. Barrington. You have been differently reared—you have prejudices against the class to which he belongs. All people cannot be alike.'

'No; there are camels and race-horses; there are barn-door fowls and larks,' said Longleat, with unconscious irony.

'You and Mr. Barrington look at life from opposite points of view. You do not understand his way of thinking, his world, his education, and you have taken a dislike to him. You are unjust to him in your heart. As for me, I know that he loves me. It is not my money that he wants—and if it were, I would give it to him freely. I must be generous. I must bestow all or nothing. I have allowed him to



become my master, and I will glory in being his slave. I will shut my mind to any doubts—I have promised, and I will never be untrue to my word. . . . You have not understood me. I have not understood myself. I am stronger and weaker than I thought. I was miserable. You might have seen it. You might have saved—I mean you might have prevented my becoming engaged to him. Now that I have given myself up I am miserable no longer.'

As Honoria stood, with her head thrown back, her eyes dilated, and determination expressed in every line of her face, Longleat felt an intense admiration for her beauty—nay, even for her resolution. Pride and love stirred his heart. She was his own. Rough and unrefined though he might be, it was his privilege to call this superb creature his child. She was bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. Even though a duke might wed her, she would be none the less his daughter—the crown of his Australian career.

'Honoriam,' he said, with a kind of wistful tenderness, 'I had meant that you should be the queen of Leichardt's Land—first lady in the country that has bred you, and that has made a great man of your father. I thought that you would have married Dyson Maddox. It was for that I got him into the Ministry—more than because he has a smart head upon his shoulders. I was waiting—waiting. I had a notion of carrying my railway. Longleat's Railway it should have been, all Australia over—and Longleat's Loan. Then I'd have gone to England, and they'd have knighted me; and I'd have worked things gradually so that Dyson should have taken my place. There's pluck and go in him. He'd make a good Premier. That was my notion. And now I'm not going to let it lie, and see you throw yourself away upon that cursed Englishman. . . . My gell! it's the first time that I've ever asked you to geve up anything your heart was set on. . . . It's the first time in all your life that I have ever

wanted to go agen you. . . . My gell! for the sake of the love I've got for you, and the pride, and for being my only one that I've worked to make a lady of—for Janie, she doesn't count; she'll never be the same as you—for my sake, gev it up, Honie—I *beg* you to gev it up!

Honorina was deeply moved.

'Father!' she said, suddenly and sharply, 'you have asked me to give up something that I care for. Will you give up something in your turn? That is fair. Will you promise not to go and see Mrs. Vallancy any more, or let people have occasion to couple your name with hers disgracefully?'

'Hush!' said Longleat; 'it is not for you to speak about this to me.'

'It *is* for me to speak!' cried Honorina. 'Do I not hear the remarks that are made? Do I not know the sort of woman she is?' (Here Longleat started guiltily.) 'Am I not your daughter? Is not your honour mine? Father, will you give her up—for *my* sake and for your own?'

'No,' said Longleat, doggedly. 'Things are come to a pretty pass if a daughter is to order her father's likings. You have got nought to do with the matter. I love you as my life, but you're apart. I have never wished you to be mixed up with Connie Vallancy. I'm a man, and being a man I've a right to choose my own way of going. It is your place to obey. I have let you have too free a rein; it is time you felt a touch of the bit. Mrs. Vallancy is my friend, and I will not desert her at your bidding.'

'Then, father,' replied Honorina, loftily, 'you cannot blame me if I refuse to desert the man I love at yours. You had better allow me to marry Mr. Barrington. There can be no use in opposing me, and it is time that I made a home for myself.'

'You want to leave me—to leave your home,' he said, in

a bewildered manner, as though her words were a painful revelation.

‘All women marry in the course of time, and have homes of their own,’ said Honoria, more gently. ‘And I am not understood. It is natural that I should long for sympathy and love.’

‘Ay!’ said Longleat, heavily, ‘that’s what we all of us, young and old, come to longing after—sympathy and love.’

The clock on the mantelshelf chimed the hour. Honoria moved towards the door.

‘I must go. Lady Georgina will be here in a moment. I am sorry, papa, but I am resolved: I will not give up Mr. Barrington!’

‘Stay!’ said Longleat; ‘I have forbidden him the house—I have told him that if he ever shows his face within my doors I’ll have him turned out!’

‘You said that?’ said Honoria, her eyes darkening and dilating with anger.

‘I did—and by heaven I meant my words! Now give me your promise that you will neither see nor speak to him.’

‘I promise that I will do neither—within these walls,’ said Honoria, deliberately, ‘but I will promise no more. Yes—I will give you my word that I will not marry him without your permission till I am twenty-one. Further than that I will not be bound.’

The two stood looking at each other for several moments before she turned the handle of the door and left the room. The same spirit of defiance gleamed from the eyes of both, only that with Honoria emotion was strained to its utmost, and having yielded her faith into Barrington’s keeping, the dominant thought was determination to cleave to him at all hazards; while in Longleat’s breast dull fury against Barrington, revulsion after his excited outbreak of supplication,

wounded love, disappointed pride, and passion for Mrs. Vallancy, bubbling up the stronger for having been momentarily stemmed—all contended for the mastery.

His eyes were the first to droop. When the door had closed upon his daughter, he flung himself into a chair, and with a despairing gesture folded his arms upon the table before him, and buried his burly head upon them.

‘God help me!’ he muttered; ‘what is a man to do when his own child turns agen him?’

Presently there was the sound of carriage-wheels without. Half-ashamed of his weakness, Longleat stole to the window, and from behind the venetian-shutter watched his daughter go forth and take her place beside the Governor’s wife.

How beautiful she looked in her well-fitting dress and little black hat with its drooping feather; but oh! how cold—how unresponsive to his keen yearning! He had fancied for a moment that she might return and say some tender word which should give him the comfort of feeling that they were not quite estranged. . . . But no; she did not even look towards the study. Nevertheless, the thought may have found an echo in Honoria’s breast; for as they were driving down Ferry Street, after having dawdled for some fifteen minutes at the library, she started up in the carriage and exclaimed:

‘Oh, I must go home for a moment; I must see my father!’

‘My dear!’ said Lady Georgina Augmering, in cold condemnatory tones, dropping the eye-glass through which she had been attentively scanning the river, ‘I don’t think that you need trouble yourself about your father. Look at him yonder in that ferry-boat, crossing to Emu Point.’

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## THE TRYST BY THE BAMBOOS.

MEANWHILE Barrington had written the following letter :

'The Club, Leichardt's Town,  
'29th April.

'My DEAREST HONORIA,

'After seeing you this morning I had an interview with your father, and am sorry to tell you that he entirely refuses to sanction our engagement. He objects to me on the grounds that I am a well-born Englishman ; that I am poor ; and that injurious reports have been circulated in connection with my retirement from the Guards. It is unnecessary for me to tell you that these rumours, which are I believe rife in Leichardt's Town, have the most vague foundation. I do not pretend to be a saint, but I can truly assure you that there is nothing in my past career which reflects a shadow upon my honour or renders me unworthy of your love.

'Your father declares that he has other views for your future—that it is his wish you should marry an Australian who will assume his name and perpetuate his political reputation. He has forbidden me to enter his house under penalty of being kicked out of it. I have, therefore, no resource but to implore that you will meet me at least once again.

'Need I say that, till with your own lips you reject me, I will accept no dismissal? This I have told your father. I claim as my right that you grant me an interview.

'Be at the wicket-gate, which leads from your grounds into the Botanical Gardens, this evening as near nine o'clock

as possible. I will add neither entreaties nor protestations. The most passionate expressions are bathos when coldly written. You must be convinced by this time of the depth of my love. All your impulses draw you towards me. Obey them, dearest, and you will be happy.

‘Ever your own,

‘HARDRESS BARRINGTON.’

When Barrington had written the letter, he was puzzled to contrive for its safe and private conveyance to Miss Long-leaf’s hands, in time for her to keep the appointment he had named. He carried it in his pocket as he wandered up and down King Street: and fortune favoured him so far that, upon turning round by the principal draper’s shop, he came suddenly face to face with Honoria, who was sitting alone in Lady Georgina Augmering’s carriage, while the latter executed some purchases within.

Though she trembled with excitement as he approached, she would not lean forward or betray any sign of eagerness.

He hurriedly placed the letter he had written in her hand.

‘I have seen your father,’ he whispered, ‘and have been forbidden your house.’

‘I know it,’ she murmured; ‘I have seen him also.’

‘And what is it to be?’ he asked, with his eyes fixed anxiously upon her face. ‘Are you going to give me up?’

She raised her head with a defiant gesture:

‘I am not so fickle a woman.’

‘To love is to trust,’ whispered Barrington, passionately; ‘and you will do what I beg of you in this letter? I have asked you to meet me this evening—trust me. You said that I should be your faith.’

‘Hush!’ said Honoria. ‘Lady Georgina is coming; I will do what you wish.’

Lady Georgina emerged from the shop. She said a few gracious words to Barrington, and gave the order to drive on.

Her verbal promise spared Honoria any agonies of indecision. When at sunset she was dropped by Lady Georgina at The Bunyas, and was able to read her letter in quiet, she never even questioned whether she should comply with her lover's demand. Of course she would go. Her direct defiance of her father's wishes removed any scruples upon the score of disobedience; and her newly-born self-reliance—or rather, reliance upon another—and her scorn of conventionality, made her blind to the shame of a clandestine meeting.

She found, upon entering the drawing-room, that her father had gone to his political dinner, and that her own guests, Cornelius Cathcart and Mr. Power, had already arrived. Honoria was unusually silent during the meal, and announced that she had a headache. It was half-past eight when they left the dining-room.

'My dear Aunt Pen,' said Honoria, pausing at the drawing-room door, and entirely disregarding the kind old lady's eagerness to hear particulars of the interview with the Premier. 'I stayed in there as long as I could, for it's all they are going to have of my company this evening. Good-night, dear, and don't come to my room and disturb me; I am not in the mood for talking. You shall hear all to-morrow.'

'My love,' said Mrs. Ferris, gulping down her disappointment, 'you are hot and feverish. I am afraid that talk with your father has upset you. Never mind—all will come right. If ever a man worshipped you, it's Mr. Barrington. Now, go and lay yourself down between the cool sheets, and read a chapter in the Bible, and ask God to bless you. I doubt, my love, that you are as prayerful as you might be.'

Honoria smiled a little grimly; then entered her pretty

bedroom which opened on to the garden, and locked the inner door that communicated with the rest of the house.

The French windows she must leave open ; they had venetian shutters that bolted on the inside. But she rang for the maid and told her that she was going to bed and did not wish to be disturbed ; then she wrapped herself in a long cloak, and put on a little black hat that left her face all uncovered, too careless and too proud to attempt any further disguise.

There was the chance that one or both of the gentlemen who were dining there that evening might be smoking in the verandah ; and when nine o'clock struck, she stole cautiously across the lawn, and into a belt of shrubbery which she skirted till she reached the bamboos that sheltered the wicket.

She paused for a moment. The night was clear and moonless. Upon the Emu Point ridge the lights twinkled like an irregular row of stars, while below the cliff lay the broad dark belt of the river. It was so still that she could hear plainly the ding-dong of the steamers' bells, and the cries of the boatmen. Before her stretched the dim expanse of garden, with its long vistas of bunya-trees, and mimosæ, and beds of azaleas and camellias, and heavy odorous magnolias. On the other side of the bamboo hedge that bounded the Premier's dwelling was an unfrequented walk, merging in a thicket of Moreton Bay fig-trees, pines, and tall, shivering bamboos. Here Honoria knew that they would probably be safe from interruption.

She opened the gate—passed through ; then relocked it, and put the key into her pocket. Hardly had she emerged from the shadow of the hedge than a tall figure advanced, and Barrington, taking her hand, led her into the concealment of the grove. Now, alone with her lover, Honoria felt no fear, yet she drew back shrinkingly from his caresses,



and, with a certain defiant pride, placed herself against the trunk of a fig-tree which faced the path.

‘Come a little further away,’ said Barrington. ‘You may be seen by some one lurking about the gardens.’

‘I am not ashamed to be recognised,’ exclaimed Honoria. ‘I would have all Leichardt’s Town know that I have defied my father’s injustice and cruelty, and that I am here to meet my lover. And what greater impropriety is there in talking to you in this garden than there was in our sitting by the lagoon at Kooralbyn?’

‘My love,’ said Barrington, ‘at Kooralbyn there were no ill-natured tongues to gossip. . . . I admire your bravery, but I must shield you from the slightest breath of slander.’

Even in the dimness, he could see that she flushed deeply.

‘There,’ said she, pettishly, ‘you spoil my illusion. Do you not see that I am trying to make myself believe that I am not your slave—that I am doing the most simple and natural thing in the world?’

‘Mutinous still,’ said Barrington tenderly, as he led her into the deepest obscurity of the thicket, and seated her upon a bench. Then he encircled her waist with his arm, and drew her close to him.

‘These nights are not like those summer evenings by the lake at Kooralbyn—oh that we were there now, away from prying eyes and meddling tongues! Are you cold, darling?’

‘No, feel my hands; they are burning; and my head is aching, and I should like to lie down and cry. My whole mind and body are in a state of feverish excitement.’

‘My love, your nerves are overstrained. Remember your declaration. You should be calm and at rest now.’

‘That I never shall be—never—as long as you are my master, and I am your slave—unless, indeed, we grow absolutely indifferent to each other, and that is what I fancy

it will come to in time. Such violent delights have violent ends. Perhaps you will tire of me, or I of you, before the year is out which I have promised my father to wait.'

'What year?' asked Barrington, startled.

'My fortune does not become my own till I am twenty-one, and I have given my word to my father that I will not marry you before that time. Who knows what may happen? I shall be twenty on the 7th of next month. Thus, there is a year and a week to wait.'

'I cannot remain in suspense for so long,' exclaimed Barrington. 'I cannot live without you. Your father's objections to me are unreasonable. Time will not soften them. Honoria, we must be married at once.'

'No,' said Honoria, firmly. 'I must submit to you in most things, but I will not be ruled in this. I will keep a shred of liberty. Do you think that I am a monster, to go against my father without feeling a pang? I love him, in my own way. I should feel myself a traitor if it were not that he is a traitor too. . . . I would have sacrificed even you if only he had consented to break with Mrs. Vallancy—but he refused—and so we go different ways, perhaps both to destruction. You know that I have been warned against you, but I ask no questions. I do not insult you by doubting your motives. I do not even wish to know why you left the Guards.'

'You are a noble woman,' said Barrington, with his eyes upon the ground. 'But,' he went on, in a hurried self-exculpatory manner, 'you need not hesitate to ask—you should hear the story, what there is to tell, if you wished. But you would not understand the world—my life. You must know that London men are not anchorites. I was no better than anyone else of my set—and no worse. I gambled—I got into debt—I was entangled with a woman whom I did not love. . . .'

‘That will do,’ said Honoria. ‘Let the past lie. I’ll believe that you are neither saint nor sinner. What does it matter? Now talk to me about England—about your mother. Will she like me, or will she despise me for being a bullock-driver’s daughter? Tell me where we shall go when we are married? We shall travel, of course. What is the most beautiful thing that you will take me to see?’

She listened in silence while he described the scenes they should visit, the life they would lead, painting the future in the most attractive colouring that his imagination could furnish—lover’s talk, fragmentary and eloquent, broken by hand-clasping and caressings—but wearisome in repetition.

‘I dare say that I should tire of it all,’ said Honoria, at length. ‘I should pine after the mountains, the wild forests, the old free life. I have read that wherever one’s lot may be cast away from home, the longing for one’s motherland intensifies with the years, till it becomes pain. I should be unsatisfied. It is always so with me. First, there is the keen wishing to make some one love me or to feel some new sensation; then revulsion and distaste. What if even you were to become hackneyed! Oh, you need not smile. I am less afraid of you now. I find that I can play upon your feelings. Look at me. Can you see my features in this dim light?’

Barrington half turned, loosening his arm, though it still supported her, as she reared herself back, facing him. The two pairs of eyes gazed into each other—hers dreamy and seductive, his bright and longing. At last Barrington exclaimed passionately:

‘Honoriam, don’t—don’t look at me in that way!’

‘Why?’ she asked, laughing softly, and still gazing.

‘Do you not understand? I love you—and . . . .’

She rose suddenly, and folded her cloak round her.

‘The moon is coming out,’ she said. ‘I ought to go

within. Oh! this hateful concealment; but time will pass and our love will be as bright as day, and then there will be no dimness, no mystery. I will kiss you—once—while it is dark. . . . No, no! I did not mean it. There!—you frighten me! No, I will not come again—I will never come again. Let me go!

But before he released her she had promised him another meeting.

And not one, but many took place, always at the same spot under the bamboos, at such hours as were convenient to Honoria to steal away from her father's guests.

Her frank *abandon* bewildered Barrington's judgment, while it intoxicated his senses. He could not determine whether the absence of that maidenly reserve which he had been accustomed to associate with young ladies of the higher classes was the result of boldness or ignorance. And here was a flaw in his logic. No wonder that he generalised accordingly. There was in her manner no symptom of coyness to indicate how far she realised the danger of her position. Though she made no protests against the clandestine meetings for which he pleaded, and seemed completely mastered by the extraordinary fascination he exercised over her, it was impossible for him to calculate upon her moods. Upon one occasion she would be tender and cooing as a dove; upon another, abrupt, cold, and almost savage in her repulse of his caresses.

One night he waited vainly under the bamboos till nearly morning, in anxious expectation of her coming, venturing even, when all the house was in darkness, to climb the wicket and tap gently at the venetian shutters of her room, but without obtaining any response. He wrote her an impassioned letter, and upon the following day she came forth, white and cold, to hear his upbraidings.

I wanted to see if I could resist you,' she said, when he

reproached her. 'I knew that you were out there waiting and listening and probably cursing me. . . . All the time that I was playing within-doors, I *felt* that your will was drawing me towards you, and I set myself in opposition to it. I said that I would see whether you could compel me. . . . I shut my lips and defied you. I don't think that I could do it again. I could not have done it then if there had not been another influence at work. . . . Oh! what a despicable creature I am! What is my love worth? Nothing—nothing. To be torn in two ways—it is shameful—it is degrading! . . . I don't know whether I hate or love you most. . . . You have been mesmerising me; that's what it is. You have got the evil eye. You are like Margrave in the "Strange Story." . . . But you are stronger than I, and I could not have kept away from you to-night—no, not if papa had held me!'

'Tell me who was with you last night?' asked Barrington, hoarsely.

'It was Dyson Maddox,' replied Honoria, quite meekly. 'He has come back from Kooralbyn, and Mrs. Ferris is going up soon. I think that I shall go with her. Angela is ill.'

'Angela ill! What ails her!' exclaimed Barrington, blankly. 'Angela ill!' he repeated.

An uneasy sense of guilt took hold of him, and all night he was haunted by Angela's pale, reproachful face.

Dyson had been for a fortnight upon the Koorong. It was a longer absence than he had intended; but there were several reasons which made him just now prefer the obscurity of Barramunda to the bustling life of Leichardt's Town. Though he had manned himself to the sacrifice of his dearest hopes, he could not face it unflinchingly.

Rumours of Miss Longleat's engagement, and of the Premier's opposition to the match, were rife upon the

Koorong. Lord and Lady Dolph heard them, and, though they regretted untoward circumstances, were jubilant for the sake of their friend. Granny Deans heard them, and mumbled something about the 'crooked stick.' Tom Dungie heard them, and upon the strength of example, began seriously to consider his matrimonial intentions towards Miss McCutchan. And Angela heard them, and drooped and withered, till her father's heart, not knowing any cause of evil, ached sorely for his darling.

The evening of his return Dyson spent at The Bunyas, in the company of Honoria and Mrs. Ferris. The meeting was an ordeal which he dreaded, and which he faced with something of the old courage that, in one of his exploring expeditions, when he had been wounded by a native spear, believed firmly to be poisoned, had made him pluck out the weapon, and, without a word, pursue his course to the northern goal which, in his heart, he did not expect to reach.

'I told you,' said Honoria, looking at him with her great star-like eyes, 'that when you came back again everything might be different with me. Everything *is* different.'

During the evening she was restless and excited; sometimes silently attentive to some outward cause of distraction, sometimes talking feverishly and hurriedly as though to escape thought. At last she sat down to the piano, and played a queer, wild waltz by Rubenstein.

Suddenly she started up, and laid her hand upon Maddox's arm. He was sitting a little behind her.

'Don't let me go out,' she said in a low, frightened voice; 'keep me from going out!'

'What do you mean?' he asked in astonished tones. 'Why, surely you are not thinking of going out at this hour?'

'No—yes! I don't know what I was thinking of—all

kinds of strange things. Let us play at cards—bézique, whist! Aunt Pen will take the dummy.'

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### TOM DUNGIE GOSSIPS.

ANGELA and Mr. Ferris were alone at Kooralbyn. Even Sammy Deans had betaken himself to Leichardt's Town; and but for the occasional visits of the new chums and 'hands,' who were employed principally upon the outside cattle-stations, and did not interfere with the domestic arrangements, the father and daughter enjoyed an almost uninterrupted *tête-à-tête*.

This time was a period of happiness to the old man. He was in his softest, most genial mood. All jarring influences were removed; and he forgot his hatred of Longleat and jealousy of Honoria in the sweet companionship of his daughter, the intellectual dissipation of prolonged readings from his favourite poets, and the artistic babbling which his soul loved.

He did not at first observe that Angela was more silent than had been her wont when alone with him; that her painting had no longer the old absorbing charm, or her books their fascination. But he noticed that she watched anxiously for the arrival of Dungie, and the opening of the mail-bag, and that she eagerly devoured her stepmother's gossiping epistles descriptive of balls, picnics and Miss Longleat's conquests, heretofore merely provocative of listless scorn, but now rendered fatally pungent by the frequent allusions to Barrington which they contained. He was dimly awake also to a change in the girl's face. The old

dreamy rapture, which had made it appear that of a being set apart from the commonplace interests of life, had softened and vivified into an exalted passion, that may be best described by comparing it with the expression which animates the features of a nun who realises all the yearnings of her human nature, in fervid communion with her spiritual spouse.

So Hardress Barrington was the lord of Angela's innermost sanctuary, the sun towards which, Clytie-like, she must look or die.

And while at first her heart glowed and expanded with this sense of glorious ecstasy, after a time, as hope of his return waned, her physical strength faded, and she was no longer equal to the long rambles beneath the silver wattles and moaning she-oaks, among bracken fern and tall grass, in which she had formerly found her deepest inspiration. Her father remarked that her step failed, and unwilling to admit that she was too weak to walk, made a pretext of wishing to explore the surrounding country more closely, and mounting her upon a quiet pony, made her accompany him in his excursions among the hills and glens. Upon these occasions it was always he who talked most.

'Look, Angela,' he would say, as they drove dreamily over the flat, where the quiet kine lifted their round eyes and gazed meditatively upon them as they passed. 'Look at yonder crag which stands out sinister and lurid against the copper-coloured sky. There's a storm rising in the Ubi Ubi district, but that has nothing to do with us. It is old Nilparoo, the spirit of the mountains, who broods vengefully over the desolation of civilisation that is creeping on through the forests. . . . Can you not mark his shadowy arms stretched forth in menace and rebuke above the tempest? . . . My love, this is nature dramatised. For the artist every landscape contains the elements of a poem.



Yonder bed of murky vapour, streaked with foamy splashes, and shading off at the edges to rose, would be a grand subject for a painter. . . .' Or later, he would exclaim, 'Angela, will there never be an Australian Ossian to strike a wild note in tune to the cry of the curlews, the moan of swamp oaks, the rushing of streams, the hum of butterflies, and sighing of leaves! Is Nature to be always eloquent here, and Art mute?'

And so they would ride on and on through the many-vistaed forest, among the aromatic gum-trees with their thickening stems and whispering foliage, till the air and the woods seemed to Angela full of forms and voices, and she knew not which was living, she or they.

And sometimes, in the very heart of the bush, she would hear Barrington's voice addressing her, and her own replying in words that seemed the outcome of her soul. And often she fancied that they had passed out of this strange, inconsistent life, which was alternately a dream of bliss and of vague dissatisfaction, to the true dream-world that to her was so much more real, and where there was no aching pain of neglect.

'Father,' she said suddenly, one day when they were riding musingly together through the trees, 'what does it feel like to die?'

'To die!' repeated Mr. Ferris. 'Ay! there's the mystery that mortal minds cannot unravel. Who ever passes the border-land, and returns to tell his tale? All Nature dies, and we know not how or wherefore. But what puts such notions into your head, Fairy?'

'I was only wondering, father, whether death is pain, or if it is no more than floating—floating away into a lighter world—just as I feel when I am tired, and lie down in the grass beneath the cedar-trees—and the air seems full of perfume, and the wind sighs gently through the branches, till I

can almost believe that it is an angel sobbing, while the water sings like a chorus of distant voices, and I fancy that I am Angela no longer, but a spirit going—I know not whither. Is this like death?

‘Angel,’ said the old man, regarding her with an expression of pained perplexity. ‘Do not dream any more such dreams as these. Do not allow your soul to go floating up too high to the sound of Nature’s music. The fairies would be glad to keep you, child, if they had the chance.’

‘Then there are fairies, father! You would never allow that before.’

‘Every poet has a myriad elves at his beck and call, my love. But here is the glen that you are so fond of, and the hoyas are all in bloom. Let us fasten up our horses, and take a ramble among the rocks.’

He lifted the fragile creature from her saddle, and they crossed the slippery stepping-stones, and followed up the windings of the stream, till they had passed the rocky heads covered with grey lichen which guarded the entrance to the ravine.

It was the cleft in the mountains which Honoria, with Barrington and the Bassetts, had visited some little while before. Several times during the Englishman’s convalescence had he and Angela ridden there together, and every rock and shrub seemed sanctified in the girl’s heart by the association of his words and looks. As the sides of the ravine closed in, affording only a slender foothold upon a natural ledge of stone, Angela clung to the hoyas creepers, which at this point tapestried the rugged walls. Here, once Barrington’s arm had encircled her. She could almost feel now the rapturous joy of the pressure which his touch communicated to her frame. The air was heavy with the scent of hoyas; the rocks seemed to shut out the outer world. What a spot in which to float away—away from the embrace

of a lover into the keeping of the mountain spirits, when weakness and weariness would cease, and the aching void in her heart would be stilled for ever.

She turned very pale; her slight figure swayed, and she would have fallen had not her father caught her.

‘My darling, my darling!’ he cried, ‘what is the matter?’

But she had fainted. Mr. Ferris carried her to the side of the pool, and bathed her forehead, and chafed her limbs, till the blood flowed slowly back to her cheeks.

‘I thought—I thought he was calling me,’ murmured Angela incoherently, as she opened her eyes; ‘and then everything grew dark.’

‘He!’ repeated Mr. Ferris, with angry bewilderment; ‘who is *he*? You have overtired yourself, my love. I have kept you too long at Kooralbyn without change—that is it. Would you like to go away, Angela? Would you like to go to Leichardt’s Town?’

‘To Leichardt’s Town,’ she said vaguely, and then a light broke over her face; ‘yes, yes, we will go there, father.’

‘I will arrange about it,’ said Mr. Ferris. ‘In a short time we will take a week’s holiday. You must remember that you are to be a great artist, my love. When you are a year older we will go together to Italy. Think of that, and you will become strong.’

‘If I were a spirit,’ murmured Angela, dreamily, ‘I might go whither I chose. I could always be with those I loved; they could not see me, but it would be best so . . . Come, father, I am quite well now. Let us gather some *hoya*, and then go home.’

This fainting fit of Angela’s, though he sought to convince himself that it was due to over-fatigue, and an abnormal mugginess of the atmosphere, troubled Mr. Ferris deeply. Why had she struck the key-note of death in so strange and suggestive a manner? What had she meant by that incoherent

allusion to an absent *he*? Had his artistic education, his endeavour to cultivate the ideal at the expense of the material, had the effect of loosening the frail cord which bound Angela to the physical world?

When they reached home, they found Dungie unsaddling his horse by the stockyard fence.

'Good-day, Mr. Ferris,' squeaked the mailman. 'Very quiet on the Koorong now, Mr. Ferris. The little piebald don't seem to know the lay of the country. Kooralbyn don't appear like the same station, with all the women-kind, excepting Miss Angela there, off of it; and I'm thinking, Mr. Ferris, that we ain't likely to see Miss Longleat up this 'ere way in a 'urry.'

'How is that?' asked Mr. Ferris, in a preoccupied manner.

'You remember that 'ere long chap from England as wur a-stopping here! Lord! if I were Mr. Dyson Maddox I'd never let it be said that a *black hat* had cut me out sweet-heartin'. I seed in a twinkling which way the wind was a-blowin', when I met them all ridin' agen the creek one day last March. It is not all folks that understand women; and it's always those as ain't afeard of 'em that takes their fancy.'

'That is true enough,' said Mr. Ferris, waking up to some degree of interest. 'And so Mr. Barrington is to marry the heiress. Is that the talk in Leichardt's Town?'

'There's more talked of nor that,' replied Dungie, confidentially. 'Folks say as the Premier 'ud go to the devil for that black-eyed young woman as he took charge on agoin' down in Cobb's coach from Kooya. You'll remember the evening, Mr. Ferris. 'Twur uncommon dodgy to get her husband out of the way by giving him a billet at Gundaroo. Maybe he is in the swindle too. But what has Sammy Deans got to say to it, Mr. Ferris?'

'Sammy Deans,' repeated Mr. Ferris, 'I heard he had taken a droving job. What is he doing at Leichardt's Town?'

'That's more nor I know. 'Twur at Kooya I seed him—agen Braysher's. "Hallo, Sammy!" I ses to him, chaffing, "so Longleat has let you out of quod at last! Lord! I never seed a man get so black in the face with rage. I wouldn't be in the Premier's shoes if Sam ever gets the chance of pitching into him. 'Twur he as told me that Mr. Barrington wur going to marry Miss Longleat. They said he were wild with love of her, that he followed her down, and never gev her no peace till she agreed to have him; and it's the notion that he'll marry her off-hand, and take her to England. The Premier, he is dead agen it; so they goes out at night, and does their spooning agen the bamboos inside the Botanical Gardens. . . . I'd ha' thought she wur too proud for that sort of servant-maid's trick—but there's no accounting for women when they've got a lover. I ses to Sam, "'Twur a good dodge of Longleat's making Mr. Vallancy police magistrate at Gundaroo;" and ses he, "Vallancy will be down in Leichardt's Town before long, and there'll be the devil of a row." But what the dickens is Sam to know about it?'

'That will do,' said Mr. Ferris, gruffly. 'I don't like such talk before my daughter. There! give me the mail-bag, and, after you have turned your horse into the paddock, you may come down to the house for a glass of grog. Come, Angel. Are you feeling ill again, my love?' he asked anxiously, for the girl was standing motionless against the stockyard fence, her eyes dilated, and her face unnaturally pale.

She moved mechanically when she was addressed, and followed her father to the house. As soon as they had reached the veranda, Mr. Ferris opened the mail-bag, which

contained the weekly instalment of newspapers, a letter of instructions from Mr. Longleat, and a short epistle from Mrs. Ferris, full of fussy anxiety about Angela's health, and only mentioning Barrington as having accompanied them to a picnic to the Bay a few days before—the miseries of which she graphically described—and as having spoken vaguely of visiting Kooralbyn shortly.

'Father!' said Angela suddenly, in the midst of reading her stepmother's letter, 'do not tell Mrs. Ferris that I am ailing—indeed, I am quite well—only always tired. And we will not leave Kooralbyn just yet, father—I would rather stay at home.'

'The Premier has written to me to examine Ross's fencing,' said Mr. Ferris, savagely lifting up his head from Longleat's note. 'A curt, peremptory command to take a ride of forty miles on business that a stockman could well do. That is what it is to be at the beck and call of a master. . . . Angela, my darling, next year we will free ourselves from the yoke of this degrading bondage. Let the old lady stay in Australia with her best beloved, and you and I will depart together. In Italy we will breathe an atmosphere of art and liberty. This is what I have been dreaming of for so long. In January next all my savings will come due in cash. My mortgages will close. Fifteen hundred pounds, my love, the fruit of ten years' slavery. That will keep us finely till my Angela has made herself known. My old aspirations will revive in you. I shall be a man once more, instead of a fawning spaniel. . . . But I should like to crush him,' he added, between his teeth—'to crush the brood before I go!'

'Father!' said Angela, with a bewildered look, 'of whom are you speaking? What is the matter?'

'It is nothing, my darling. I am apt to become excited over trivial occurrences—small slights—pinpricking insults.

It's a sign that I'm getting old, my love. . . . What was it that Dungie said about Barrington and Miss Longleat, and their midnight strolls beneath the bamboos? There's the old blood coming out—the mother's blood—and the father's. She will come to harm. So, for her beauty he loves her, and for the money's sake he will marry her. Pish! it makes me mad to think of the power of wealth. . . .'

He went on mumbling for a few minutes; then, being suddenly called away to the store, he turned before leaving the room and passionately kissed his daughter.

Trembling and faint with the pangs of a new-born anguish, Angela ran into the garden, and threw herself on the ground beside the lagoon.

The dull aching of an undefined desire had turned to the fierce pain of disappointment, all the keener for the reason that her previous exaltation had been entirely spiritual. She had worshipped Barrington as a mystic might worship a star, believing it to represent the particular divinity to whom he owed his being. The more terrestrial communion of marriage had never been actually present to her thoughts. In her childish imagination the future had been all dim. That she might be near him, watch his face, hear him speak, know that he held her in tender affection, had seemed bliss beyond expectation.

Now a fierce jealousy of Honoria burnt into her very soul. Though she had not dreamed that she could be to him best and dearest, the certainty that another owned all his love was agony, and transformed her from an abstract ethereal being—a child of nature, knowing nothing of human longings—into a passionate woman.

Had he not pressed her in his arms, stroked her hair, and bidden her love him? To the heart of an innocent maiden what covenant could be more binding? And now it was Honoria whom he caressed.

But the postman's story might not be true. Dungie was a gossip, and had probably listened to idle rumour, which had always made free with Miss Longleat's name. . . . Mrs. Ferris had said that he had spoken of visiting Kooralbyn. Oh, he must come soon! She would beg him to hasten . . . and then she would tell him of the dull pain with which his absence had wearied her—of how her heart had yearned after him; and she would pray him to let her serve him—to be his sister, his slave—she could not dare say 'wife.' . . . And if she died of shame in speaking, the spirits of nature would bear her upwards, and would tell the good God that she was but a harmless creature of the forest like themselves, and had meant no wrong. . . . It might be that he would grieve for her love and for her fate, and that when he walked by the river where they had strolled together, would think of her with tender pity. . . . It might be—who could tell?—that God would suffer her to hover still above her old haunts, and she might touch his hand and whisper in his ear, 'Angela is beside you. She could not live without your love.' And he would fancy that it was the wind or the stream that spoke, and would remember all that she had told him of Nature's many voices.

That night when the moon shone upon her white chamber, she rose and wrote a little letter :

'Angela's heart is aching, and the days are long. Oh, come back, or take her to you! She cannot live without your love.'

She sealed her letter, and with her own hands placed it in the mail-bag.

Barrington received it one night upon his return from a long tryst with Honoria. The passionate childish sentences touched him keenly.



‘Innocent Angel!’ he murmured. ‘Poor little white bushflower!’

He held her tiny missive tenderly before him, smiling sadly as he pictured the trembling hands that had penned it. His eyes were dim as he tore poor Angela’s confession into small shreds, and watched it burning till it lay a little pinch of dust.

‘I must write to her,’ he said to himself. ‘Poor child! What am I that I should have won her guileless heart? Love is a dream of heaven to her—my pure Angel! She has steeped her soul in poetry. This comes of reading “Laon and Cythna” by the creek. . . . I wish I had never gone to Kooralbyn. I wish I had never kissed her. And yet I’d as soon have fondled a pretty child. Who would have dreamed that she had any thoughts of love?’

During the following week Angela waited in trembling excitement for the mail-day, but before Dungle’s arrival, the news which he had borne received a vague confirmation from the lips of Dyson Maddox, who, having been a week or more at Barramuda, rode over in fulfilment of his promise to Mrs. Ferris, before his return to Leichardt’s Town.

The old man had gone, according to Mr. Longleat’s orders, to examine Ross’s fencing, and Angela received Dyson alone.

He had always been fond of Angela, though he, like many others, compassionated in her the visionary nature of her childlike intellect. To-day a subtle sense of sympathy seemed to draw them towards each other.

‘Are you quite well, Angela?’ he asked kindly. ‘I promised Mrs. Ferris that I would ride over and judge with my own eyes whether it would please you if she came back.’

‘No,’ replied Angela, almost pettishly. ‘Let her stay in Leichardt’s Town. She cares for Honoria more than for

me. It would not please me at all if she came back ; and, indeed, it is quite unnecessary.'

'Still I am sure that you are ill, or unhappy,' urged Dyson. 'Tell your old friend what is amiss.'

She looked at him for a moment, while tears gathered in her eyes : then turned away silently weeping.

'Something vexes you,' continued Dyson. 'You are grieved, perhaps, because your stepmother does not understand you.'

'Grieved for that !' she repeated, with a half-scornful, half-amused inflection in her voice. Ah ! it is always so,' she added sadly. 'Not even those who know us best can read the language of our souls. If we have yearnings, they must forsooth be for something commonplace—not for a good which is as high above us as the stars.'

'You are an artist, Angela,' said Dyson, gently ; 'and to you the ideal, always possible, is always present. Is it then only vague dissatisfaction with what seems to you mean and prosaic that makes you sad ?'

She shook her head. It was impossible for her to reply, 'It is the woman's heart, not the artist's soul, that bleeds.'

'I think that I am always sad,' she answered ; 'not more so now than usual. It is because you yourself are unhappy that you imagine me to be so. I am quick at reading faces. I read trouble in yours.'

'You are right, child,' replied Dyson. 'It is a relief to confess to you that I have a trouble, though I do not know that it weighs more heavily upon me now than it did a little while ago. I suppose that while there remains a hope of winning what one longs for, it is impossible to resign one's self to absolute failure. But one's own misery is nothing ; the real wretchedness lies in the doubt whether—whether those we love have chosen wisely for their own happiness.'

'Is it true,' asked Angela, turning very pale, 'that Mr. Barrington loves Miss Longleat?'

'There is no doubt of that.'

'And is there any doubt,' cried Angela, sharply, 'that she loves him?'

'I wish I could say so, but I cannot. It is more than love—it is unwholesome fascination.'

'He will marry her,' said Angela, quietly, 'and then he will take her away to England. She will have all his love—and she *must* love him. I am very sorry for you—oh! I am—I am indeed!'

Then she suddenly left the room, and he saw her no more till a few moments before his departure, when she brought in the mail-bag.

'Why, Angela!' he exclaimed, as he watched her undoing the straps which held it, 'how your hand trembles! Do you expect ill news?'

She shook out the letters and papers in a white fluttering heap, and was taking away two directed to herself, when he detained her.

'Stay! I am going away presently, and I do not feel happy about you. What shall I say to your stepmother?'

'Tell her not to mind about me. I am well—quite well!'

And she flew out of the house, away into the plain, where she buried herself among the long grass and began to read. She opened her stepmother's letter first. It contained affectionate injunctions to be in betimes, not to 'moon' about by the river, and to bid Keziah prepare beef-tea and jelly for her nourishment. All this Angela scanned impatiently, till she came to the concluding paragraph:

'Our gaieties do not flag. Honoria appears in full spirits and beauty, though somewhat worn, as is natural, by her

dissipation. She is followed by an ever-increasing train of admirers, whose hopes—alas for them, poor souls!—are doomed to disappointment. Last week, my dear, Honoria informed me that she had pledged her heart to Mr. Barrington. He is a fine fellow, and I love him dearly; but I fear that parental opposition will darken their otherwise bright prospects of happiness. Mr. Longleat has set his face against the match. However, I have no doubt in my mind that time will soften his objections. The news is not, of course, made public; but I confide it to my dearest Angela, whose heart will, I know, deal full measure of sympathy to her friend Mr. Barrington.'

Poor Angela uttered a low moan, as though a cruel hand had struck her; then she lifted Barrington's letter, and kissed the bold clear characters of the envelope, and laid it down again, not daring to read her own death-warrant. At last she broke open the seal.

It was written in warm courteous language—a letter that might have been read upon the housetops—meant to be kind, but worse than cruel—informing her of his engagement, appealing for sympathy to her sisterly affection, ignoring the possibility of any deeper attachment, and playfully alluding to 'future happy days' which *they*—he, she and his bride—would spend together 'in Italy.'

She flung herself upon the ground, and deep-drawn sobs broke the stillness which reigned over the plain. The wild birds hovered above the poor child's prostrate form. . . . The sun sank behind the hills, turning the mountains to purple, and casting golden gleams upon the lagoon, and long shadows upon the sward; the chill of night crept over the flat, and the dew began to fall—but still the stricken girl lay crushed to the earth with her misery.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## THE DIAMONDS.

MRS. VALLANCY was alone in her pretty drawing-room at Emu Point. The windows were closed, and a fire burning upon the hearth cast cheerful gleams upon the Japanese screens and cabinet, and expensive ornaments—considerably augmented of late—that were scattered about the room. The scent of flowers pervaded the atmosphere, and upon a small table near the fire there was placed a tray with tea and coffee. Mrs. Vallancy herself was richly dressed, and her dark hair carefully arranged. The worn look about her mouth had disappeared now that she had gained ease and freedom from petty care, and a casual observer would hardly have taken her for three-and-twenty.

She walked several times to the window and peered out. She was expecting Mr. Longleat. After each fruitless expedition, she would return to the fireplace, and leaning her elbows upon the velvet-covered mantel-shelf, would rest her chin upon her hands, and stare absently at herself in the glass. Had her thoughts been uttered, they might have framed themselves somewhat in the following fashion :

‘Longleat is late to-night. I wonder if he’ll come, and if he will bring me the diamonds. I’ve always wanted to have a set of diamonds ; they go so well with dark hair. . . . Brian used to say— Oh, my love ! . . . . If he could see me now, would he hate me ? Would he despise me utterly ? . . . . No—no. He *must* know that my heart—my life—are his. He has but to claim them. . . . Am I not degraded ?’ she said in an excited whisper. ‘What wonder that my marriage should have killed self-respect ?’

Let the world call me wicked—let women shun me—let men despise me ! Do I not hate and scorn my own soul for the baseness with which it has been poisoned ? It is nothing—nothing to him or me ! If to be faithful is falsity—then, O Brian, I am false indeed . . . . And *he* is so rich—so old—so rough !' She laughed in a low, jarring way. 'What harm is there in taking his presents ? Is it worse than cheating people out of their money at play, and telling lies, and—— Everyone has a right to do the best they can for themselves. And I tried, when I chose Edward ; but what a miserable mistake ! . . . . It is not so very long ago since Brian and I were going to marry, and it was all love and kisses ; and I was half inclined to run away with him, not caring whether we starved or feasted. But that was when I was young ; and—who can tell ?—it mightn't have lasted.'

She went again to the window, and looked out—no sign of anyone coming. She heaved a sigh as though a reprieve had been granted her ; and returning to the mirror, gazed at herself once more, straightening her long neck, and smiling with a woman's kittenlike delight in her own prettiness.

'I am growing handsomer every day. All my colour, and softness, and roundness have come back since Edward went to Gundaroo. If it wasn't for the nights, the long, lonely, terrible nights, when I lie awake, frightened at the shadows, and the creakings. I wonder why there has been no letter from Gundaroo this mail . . . He has always written ; he is more affectionate ; he makes me feel guilty ; he is fonder of me now that we are separated. Who knows ? Perhaps we might have been fairly happy together if it had not been for debt and drink. . . . It is strange that he has not written. It looks as if something were not right—he cannot have heard anything about Longleat up there. Heavens ! if he should come down !'

She blanched at the idea, and to banish the unpleasant thought, took a letter from her bosom, and read it lovingly, pressing it once or twice to her lips.

'Brian, Brian?' she murmured, 'we shall be together. You'll come back—I knew you would. I knew that you would never be happy in Melbourne if I wasn't there.'

There was a step upon the veranda, and then a ring at the little bell which hung without. Mrs. Vallancy hastily concealed the letter she had been reading, and waited for a few moments irresolute. Her bosom heaved, and her face blanched. The ring was repeated, and she went to the door.

A man stood in the veranda. He held a parcel and a letter in his hand. Recognising the lady who stood framed against the light, he touched his hat.

'I've got something from Mr. Longleat,' he said, 'which I was bidden to give to Mrs. Vallancy herself.'

'I am Mrs. Vallancy,' replied Constance. 'Give it to me.'

The man obeyed, and having accomplished his mission, departed. Holding the letter and packet in her hand, she returned into the glow of the firelight.

'He is not coming,' she murmured in a tone of deep relief—'and he has sent me the diamonds.'

The packet was oblong, substantial, sealed with the arms of Leichardt's Land, and directed in the Premier's precise, studied handwriting. With a strange, half-cynical smile upon her lips, Mrs. Vallancy contemplated it for a moment.

Presently, she broke the cord which bound the parcel. A morocco-covered case appeared from under its enveloping folds of paper. She touched a spring, and a magnificent necklace of diamonds lay glittering beneath the lamp. As she lifted the ornament from its velvet bed, each gem scintillated in the light, and seemed to emit sparks of fire. She could not repress a cry of satisfaction.

Standing in front of the mirror, she clasped the necklace round her smooth white throat. The rays of the diamonds matched the sparkle of her eyes, and enhanced the brilliancy of her complexion. Certain words which, in his rough way, the Premier had uttered not many days before, came into her memory.

‘A man doesn’t need to be a fine scholar or a poet to lead the people and to show a woman what he can do for her. She that I love should have the best of everything—no jewels would be too fine for her. She should have handsome dresses—carriages—servants—her bidding should be done as though she were a queen. . . . .’

She opened Longleat’s letter which had been penned hastily, and in an impulsive manner that betrayed the inward excitement of the writer.

The Premier excused his failure in keeping the appointment which he had made with Mrs. Vallancy for that evening.

‘I have been detained by political business,’ he wrote. ‘Those fools out west have been sending me a deputation about the railway, and I am obliged to see some of the envoys to-night. It is gratifying to be assured that the confidence of the public is reposed in me, though I feel that the people at large have no consideration for political morality. It’s for me they care, not for my policy; and if I was to go dead against the Kooya Railway to-morrow, they would support my side just the same. But I am not the man I was, Constance. I don’t feel as though I had the pluck to fight my battles as I used in the old days when I started in Leichardt’s Land. I can own this to you, for my future lies in your hand, and *you* have the power to crush me to the earth or to lift me to the skies. You know that I am half a fatalist. Ever since we travelled down from Kooya that



evening together, I have had a feeling that my career was approaching its crisis. There is a presentiment strong upon me now that the climax is near.

‘These jewels are in themselves nothing to me—they can be nothing to you. Yet they may be to me the sign of joy or misery. We shall meet at the Frazers’ Ball to-morrow night; if the diamonds sparkle upon your neck I can defy Fate.’

Again, as Constance raised her head, the reflection of her face stared at her from the glass, and with cruel eyes and cold lips seemed to mock like an evil spirit at the wavering womanly impulses which rose in her heart, reminding her that she was a wife—that she had been a mother.

Like a blinding rain, her tears came and obscured the answering eyes. Her frame shook with sobs that seemed to draw up her very life in their gasps, and in a loud whisper, her voice sounded between the moans: ‘Oh! my baby . . . my baby. . . .’

But in a little while the waves of remorse passed over her, leaving her bruised but unconscious of pain.

‘Oh! what is the use?’ she cried, in a passionate undertone. ‘Can I be better or worse than I am? If a camellia is plucked and tarnished, what matter how soon it is trodden under foot? . . . When the bloom is gone, what is left? And am I not tarnished? To sell for money—to give nobly for love—who sees the distinction? Has not the world cried me down? . . . Have not women held aloof from me? Has not even *he* shrunk at the sound of his daughter’s name upon my lips? . . . Better sink—sink. There may be peace in degradation.’

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Upon the day but one following, Dyson Maddox called at Mr. Longleat’s office to discuss with his chief a matter connected with the Department of Lands.

The Premier had already received several visitors that morning. Two or three of the newly-elected members, at this time in Leichardt's Town for the opening of Parliament, which was to take place a few days later, had come to assure him of their support and esteem. The Premier was inwardly jubilant at the thought of the overwhelming majority which his appeal to the country had secured for him. Where were his presentiments now? Success seemed to smile upon him from every quarter; and a pile of letters which he had that morning received—letters of congratulation, of inquiry, nay, even of threatening—assured him of coming triumph.

'The Opposition is pretty well done for this time,' he said, as Dyson sat down on the other side of his table. 'I have had Lester with me for the last half-hour. He tells me that Middleton is absolutely raging, and that he declares he will unseat me for bribery. Let him try it if he can. He would pray to the devil to see me ousted. Lester will move the address, and we'll get the Loan Bill through as soon as possible. First come first served. . . . I see that you have brought me the papers upon Hedley's application for compensation;' and there ensued a deeply interesting consultation, at the close of which Longleat remarked, awkwardly fingering a bundle of official documents that lay before him :

'I say, the Gundaroo Report was telegraphed this morning—more complications with those d—d Chinamen: it was signed "F. Painswick." What is the meaning of that? and where is Vallancy?'

'Vallancy applied some little while ago for a month's leave of absence upon urgent private business. You were electioneering at the time. The matter came up for discussion in the Cabinet, and permission was granted.'

'The devil it was!' cried Longleat furiously, rising and walking rapidly across the office.

‘And why was I not informed of this?’

‘The question did not come immediately under your jurisdiction,’ replied Dyson, calmly. ‘I suppose that it was dealt with in the usual way.’

Longleat smothered an oath in his throat. Both the men were well aware that each knew what was passing through the mind of the other, and both were determined not to make any sign of consciousness.

Dyson got up and collected his papers.

‘I think that is all,’ he said. ‘We shall meet at the Executive this afternoon. As regards Vallancy’s leave, I should think that he would report himself very shortly; he will probably have taken the Torres Straits boat, which is due in the bay now.’

‘It was infernal cheek to apply for leave when he had only been up there for three months,’ said Longleat, gruffly; ‘I cannot understand why you granted it. It is the greatest mistake not to keep these fellows under your thumb. The further north they are, the less reason for their coming down.’

‘Vallancy threatened to resign if his leave were not granted. I don’t suppose that would have been of much consequence; but Little appeared to think it desirable that he should be at hand to give evidence about these northern pearl-fisheries. If the question is to be brought up in the House, it is as well that we should be primed with information.’

The Premier growled a sulky assent, and Dyson withdrew.

Mr. Longleat wrote at once to Mrs. Vallancy, informing her of what he had heard. He sealed the letter with his big signet-ring, and gave it to his private messenger, enjoining him to deliver it into the lady’s own hands.

Almost directly afterwards he was seized with a strange

giddiness and cold sweat, and was forced to untie his cravat and go forth into the air.

'I don't know what has come to me,' he muttered. 'I am not the man I was. I feel like the classical chap, that old Ferris primed me about for one of my speeches, who had the sword over his head ready to fall every moment. . . . O Lord! O Lord! the ripest peach has a maggot inside. The world is all for me, and those that are nearest me go agen me. . . . All but her. She is mine—mine—I am certain of her now. . . . It shall be made up to her for what she has suffered. She shall know what it feels like to be worshipped—to have money flowing like water through her hands. . . . And the bill is certain to pass. There's something in having lived for that. It is a joke; it's . . . Sir Thomas Longleat—Longleat the bullock-driver—the—the great Australian legislator. A man like me to project a railway—to negotiate a loan of two millions. By the Lord Harry! if it was put into a book no one 'ud believe it.'

As he walked to Government House, he saw that the Torres Straits mail-boat was already signalled. In a few hours Vallancy, if he were indeed on board, would be with his wife. He was at liberty to swear at her—to taunt her—to strike her; while he, Longleat, who worshipped the very hairs of her head, was powerless to protect her from injury. Was this British law? He swore that if there came a time in the far future when he should be the Liberator of Australia he would make divorce an easy matter. The law here should be as in America. Grand free lands required free legislature. That cursed British yoke!

Longleat began to think that after all there might be a mistake, and Vallancy might not be on board. Urgent private business, and his wife knew nothing of it! Could it be that he had heard rumours?—that—— Well—what

then? Vallancy had disdained the treasure which had been his. He had suffered his jewel to lie trampled in the very dust. If to lift tenderly and enshrine the gem were robbery—was it not robbery justified?

Perhaps, also, it might be well that he should not have many opportunities for seeing Mrs. Vallancy while the Loan Bill was passing through the House. This supreme crisis in his political career would demand his undivided attention.

But afterwards. . . . Nay, then he would right matters so that the sin should be condoned, and society compelled to recognise the justice of Nature's laws. It was well known what manner of man Mr. Vallancy was. The world must pity Constance rather than condemn her. With the triumphant all goes well. When he returned from England—Sir Thomas Longleat, the projector of the great loan—this nine days' wonder would have subsided; Constance, as his wife, would be received, and her past would not be remembered against her. Did *he* not know that it was easy to blot out what Society called disgrace?

But there was one bitter drop in the cup of his joy. Honoria, cold, defiant, but oh how dearly loved, could have no part in it. Could he form any scheme of happiness to connect her with which was like the desecration of a sacred shrine? He told himself in his bitterness that had she but broken down the barrier of reserve which held them asunder, he would have desired no dearer companionship. Had she not been so sweetly disdainful; had she identified herself more completely with his interests, and chosen such a husband as he would have approved—an Australian of the purest type, who would participate in his closest sympathies, and perpetuate his labours—would not her pride be his pride? her love his love? her ambition his ambition? Oh, if she would but marry Dyson, whose warmest aspirations were bounded by the shores of his native land, whose chil-

dren might well be the federators and liberators of their great and glorious country, would not Honoria be in very deed the choicest jewel in his crown of success !

All the time that the Council was proceeding, and whilst his brain was ostensibly occupied with civil and political matters, Longleat's inner thoughts harped upon these themes. When the meeting was over, and the Ministers were about to take their departure, the Governor said to him :

'We shall meet at the farewell dinner to General Compton, Mr. Longleat, I suppose ?'

He answered with absent-minded dignity :

'No, your Excellency. I have business in Kooya that evening. I am more than half an advocate for Independence and Federation, as your Excellency is aware. It is bound to come sooner or later, though the time is not ripe yet. I cannot say that I am one with the principle of foreign occupation. I'm all for breeding from true Australian stock : our own soldiers—our legislators—our rulers.'

'Come, come, Mr. Longleat,' answered the Governor, with good-humoured banter ; 'we have always had a suspicion that you were a sort of Australian Fenian, but that is going too far, you know. Home Rulers ! It's striking at the root of authority—it's defying her Majesty's supremacy.'

'You'll find that Federation will come in our children's time, if not in our own, your Excellency,' said Longleat. 'Why should not the Australian States be as powerful as the United States of America ? Why should we not have our Washingtons, our Lincolns, our Grants ?'

Mr. Little, the Attorney-General, joined in with a great guffaw.

'Egad, your Excellency, if Longleat were to set up the cry of Australian independence I would not give twopence for British supremacy in Leichardt's Land.'

‘What is the meaning of Longleat’s great popularity?’ asked the Secretary for Public Works, a quiet, well-educated Englishman—a squatter on the Ubi Ubi district—of one of his colleagues, as they walked behind the Premier towards the Parliamentary Buildings. I see nothing remarkable in him—and yet there is no doubt that no one could fill his place in Leichardt’s Land.’

‘He is the representative of two classes,’ replied the other. ‘Therein lies the secret of his influence. He is a self-educated man, who has raised himself by pluck and energy from the lowest social stratum to the highest; therefore he exhibits the possibilities of an Australian career. He is lavish of his money, and is not ashamed to own whence it came. He is a Radical at heart, and can appeal to the mob. And his appearance is in his favour. There is about him a kind of rugged honesty and rough nobility which tells. His prestige is purely personal, and that, after all, for the time being, is a surer basis than one of policy.’

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### CHAPTER XXX.

#### ‘AT THE CENTRE OF PEACE.’

ANGELA was very ill. From the date of Dyson’s visit to Kooralbyn she had drooped visibly, though she did not complain, and strenuously resisted any suggestion of her father’s that Mrs. Ferris should be summoned from Leichardt’s Town.

The old man tortured himself with forebodings, which gave place to rallyings of hope when she assured him that nothing was really amiss with her, and that she was only ‘so tired.’ He found comfort in the reflection that Angela,

the child of warmth and sunlight, had always faded in the winter. She could not endure the breath of cold; her whole being seemed to expand with the life of nature, the song of birds, and the luxuriance of growth. He told himself, with a vain effort at conviction, that her strength and energy—little enough at best—would revive with the spring.

It came into Angela's mind at this time that she would paint a portrait of herself for Barrington, who had often expressed a desire to possess her likeness. She felt feverishly excited at the thought of gratifying his wish, and had all the sentimental pleasure of a poetic nature in thus providing an ever-present remembrance of herself for the man she loved.

She fancied that thus there might ever be two Angelas near him: the earthly one, whose wistful gaze would always awaken regret for the little bush-flower whom he had loved so lightly—the other, that invisible spirit of the air, who would fan his brow and carry sweet thoughts to his soul and whisper tender words in his dreams.

One day her father entered the studio unawares, and found her weeping bitterly over her easel.

'Angela, my darling!' he cried, 'why are you doing this? If you really wish to paint your own portrait, my love, wait till you are well and bright again. Do not perpetuate this pale face. In the springtime you will be yourself once more, rosy and gay. Be patient till then, and do not sadden both yourself and me.'

'Father,' said Angela, tremulously, 'I want to paint my face as it looks now. It is a whim, a freak. Your little girl was always very wilful, and indeed you used to say that she must not be crossed in anything she took to heart—and so I must have my way. When I have finished the picture I will put it by, and it shall vex you no more. Father,' she added presently, 'will you gather me a cluster of the ti-flowers that grow by the creek, and some of the lotus-lilies



and the blossoms of the gum-tree. See, I have a bunch here, but they are withering—only the scent remains.’ She lifted the drooping flowers from her lap and held them to her lips. ‘Do you know why I love flowers so dearly? The fairies have told me that they are living things—just as you and I are living, and the perfume of a blossom is its soul. The petals fade and droop, but the soul becomes a flower-angel. . . . Is the picture like me, father?’

‘It has your eyes, my darling, but they see a vision which I know not. Angel, put it away; I cannot bear to look at that pale face; it vexes me. Whom have I in the world but you?’

‘Take me to the lagoon, father,’ said Angela, restlessly, ‘and let me gather the lilies for myself.’

‘It is getting late, my love, and the dew is falling.’

‘There is no dew yet; and if there were, O father, nothing hurts those the fairies love—it will not harm me. The sun is high yet. I want to watch the changing lights upon the mountains. I must finish my study of sunset-colouring soon; the sunsets are so much more beautiful in the winter. Leave me by the water’s edge for a little while. Let me gather the lilies and watch the plain and the sky, and dream a picture. Come, father.’

He took her to the lagoon and left her alone as she desired, returning to the studio, where he remained for a long time gazing at her incompleting portrait. When the shadows began to lengthen he went back to seek her, but she was not in the spot where he had placed her; and after calling her once or twice and receiving no reply, he imagined that she had gone within.

But she had wilfully stolen from his sight to a spot a little higher up the banks, where the hills dipped down into the lagoon. She had seated herself upon a knoll among the sedgy reeds and grass. The setting sun was mirrored in the

lake, deep, deep below the lily-leaves, and it seemed to her to resemble her own sun, which was going down too.

Suddenly as she sat, some lines in the poem which Barington had read to her by the river entered her mind :

'And the great world shall go round to renewing of days; but  
to-morrow  
I shall be deep in the heart of the hills, at the centre of peace.'

And she saw him as in her dream-world, and she herself rising higher and higher in light air, mid shadowy forms and sweet sounds, where, mingling her voice with the breath of the wind, she might murmur softly :

'Love, my love! no harm shall come nigh thee when Angel is near.'

A mist rose from the lagoon and shrouded the valley in its deadly exhalations. Chill and sore, Angela crept home-wards.

Upon the next morning she did not appear as usual, and when her father went to her bed he found her lying with bright eyes and scarlet lips, while her hair was tossed all about the pillow, and her thin hands moved uncertainly over the bedclothes.

'I'm so thirsty,' she said, in a helpless, wandering way. 'Old Nilparoo has stretched his arms out over the plain and has dried up the springs and the rivers, and there is no water anywhere, and the lilies are all gone. There are knives cutting into my chest, and I'm so hot. Oh, let us go away—away to the sea. Let us get into a ship and float,

“ Swift as a cloud between the sea and sky,  
Beneath the burning moon seen far away,  
Mountains of ice like sapphire piled on high.”

And then there's the serpent gleaming in the water . . . and oh, I'm so thirsty! I wish mother were here.'

'She shall come; she shall come at once, my love,' cried Mr. Ferris. Angela did not usually call her stepmother by

the dearer title, and the old man cursed his own folly in not having recalled his wife sooner.

He rushed out to the kitchen and consulted with Keziah, who laid a poultice upon Angela's chest, and prepared an unwholesome decoction of stale bread, which she called toastwater, and which the sick girl drank greedily.

'She has been and caught a chill,' said Keziah, later, 'all along of her wandering ways; and I don't know, no more than a baby, what ought to be done. She has been light in her head, but she is getting quiet now, and stupid like. There's all the bread in the oven, and not a man upon the place but islanders. If I was you, Mr. Ferris, I'd ride over the creek and bring Mrs. Deans across. She has had a child of her own, and ought to know something about sickness, and till she comes, I'll stop with the poor thing and do what I can.'

After her wandering talk, during which she mingled in strange confusion the myths and realities of her fancy, Angela seemed to fall into a state of semi-stupor, and lay still with anxious breathing, and flushed face turned sideways upon her pillow. Clearly Keziah was totally inefficient as a nurse, and was moreover continually upon the point of dissolving into tears; while Mr. Ferris, like many womanish, self-absorbed men, had no knowledge of how to deal practically with illness. Something must be done at once, and the doctor—there was none nearer than Kooya—must be summoned. Keziah's suggestion of fetching Margaret Deans was a good one, and Mr. Ferris saddled his horse and rode across the creek to the free selector's hut.

Margaret was ironing in the front room, and Sammy, who had arrived the previous evening from Leichardt's Town, was curled up in an arm-chair, with his pipe in his mouth, and a newspaper before him. Mr. Ferris was too deeply agitated to take any notice of his friend's return.

'Mrs. Deans!' he said imploringly, 'I want you to come straight over to the station. Angela, my daughter, is ill. I don't know what is the matter with her, but I think that it is some sort of inflammation of her chest. I must send for Mrs. Ferris at once. There is no one but Keziah. Will you look after the child till my wife comes? I know that you are a good nurse. Put on your bonnet, like a kind soul, now—directly.'

Margaret Deans was a good-natured creature, and put down her iron with an expression of deep concern.

'Happen she have caught a chill, Mr. Ferris. She were a poor weak thing at her best. Yes, I'll come, and welcome. Sam and Black Charlotte can look after Granny while I'm away; can't you, Sam?'

'Mister Ferris don't seem to think nowt of me,' growled Sam, sullenly.

'My daughter is ill!' cried Mr. Ferris, wildly. 'How can I give a thought to anything else? Sam, you know how a man feels when his only child is ailing.'

'Ay!' said Sam, with bitterness; 'I tow'd you there were one thing as cut all men alike to the quick. Hain't I known what it were to know your only one was dyin', and to be pent up between iron bars, so that for all the fierce fire that were ragin' in your heart, you could not get to the little one that you loved better nor your life. . . . And what would you say, Mr. Ferris, if I were to tell you what had set your gell frettin' and ailin'?''

'What do you mean?' cried the old man. 'Speak, and don't keep me in suspense. What should have made her ill? She has caught a cold; she was always delicate. She has not been fretting. What should she have fretted for? Oh! be quick, my good woman. Get on your bonnet, for the love of God. Don't be longer than you can help.'

'It's always them as are nearest that are blindest,' returned Sammy. 'I never tow'd you how I had seen Angela, your daughter, daundering beside the creek with that long Englishman, Barrington—the fellow that folks say is mad with love for Miss Longleat. I never tow'd you that he wur holding your Angela in his arms, and kissing her face, and that she wur looking up at him and telling him that she wanted nowt but to be near him.'

'You are mad?' cried Mr. Ferris. 'My Angela, who had no thought but of her art; that child love! It is impossible!'

'You had a notion that she wur nowt but a child, and all the time he wur turning her into a woman. Ay; he kissed her, and fondled her, and made believe that he loved her. It's the way of some men with women. I am speaking as true as Shakespeare, Mr. Ferris. If you doubt me, go and ask her who held her in his arms by the creek agen the selection, and who kicked Sammy Deans out of the tree where he had the ill-luck to be sitting, hearing all that was said? Hasn't it been since Barrington took up with Miss Longleat that she has drooped and dwindled?'

'If I thought that this was true!' moaned Mr. Ferris. 'Oh, my Angela! if I thought that this was true!'

'Ask her,' repeated Sam. 'Bid her tell you whether Barrington did not fool her into loving him; and if it is not Miss Longleat who has bewitched him from her?'

A heavy curse upon Honoria fell from the old man's lips. It seemed as though his pent-up hatred of Longleat's daughter found vent in the imprecation; for, with the inconsistency of his warped nature, his fury seized more fiercely upon her than upon Barrington.

It had ever been so. The joys which had fallen to her lot had appeared to him the outpourings of the cup of his daughter's happiness. Riches, beauty, health, and now love

—all were hers, while to Angela there remained but the endowment of genius—the richest of gifts in one sense, in another the poorest.

Angela was dying! A prophetic instinct carried this conviction to his heart, and filled it with a sense of unbearable misery. The blow which felled him now, seemed more dire than any he had yet received, depriving him of the very motive of existence—and it had been dealt him by Honoria Longleat, whom he hated with the unreasoning hatred that is born of jealousy.

'Sam!' he exclaimed hoarsely, clutching the free selector's arm as he spoke, 'if what you have told me is true, if wrong has been done to my darling, I'll crush them, father and daughter—crush them both! Neither his wealth nor her beauty shall avail them anything; his world shall know him for what he is. . . . If my Angela is taken from me, it is no matter whether I live or die. Death has no terrors, life no motive, no joy. I'll go away from this place, and wander about the earth a vagabond again. It has all come to me since this morning. I did not know before that she was in danger, and I'm mad, man; I tell you that I'm mad! Is my only one to be laid low, while *his* daughter flourishes on the fat of the land, and takes all for which my Angela yearned? Is *he* predestined to triumph, while I am foredoomed to failure? If there were a God in heaven, happiness and misery would be held more evenly in the balance. . . . And I could brand him as a felon—he, the Premier of Leichardt's Land. I could tread him down like a worm in the dust!'

'Do you mean what you say, Mr. Ferris?' cried Sam, starting from his chair, his white, leering face wearing an expression of intensified eagerness. 'Will you let me have a sight of those papers in the safe?'

'Bah!' cried Mr. Ferris, shaking him off. 'It is your

own paltry revenge that you are seeking. My sufferings are nothing to you. Come, Mrs. Deans'—for Margaret, equipped, and with a small bundle in her hand, had entered—'do not let us waste another moment. Sam, I have a favour to ask of you. Will you take the buggy down, post-haste, to Kooya, telegraph there to Mrs. Ferris to meet you, and bring back both her and the doctor? For God's sake don't refuse me! There's not a man about the place, except the islanders. All the hands are mustering at Binbilla. Will you go, Sam—at once? I cannot leave my daughter.'

'Yes, I'll go,' replied Sam, slowly; 'though you did not give a thought to me when I were in quod, and couldn't get nigh the little chap. But though my revenge is paltry, I am still thinking of it, Mr. Ferris. I'll go, if you will promise me that should the worst you fear happen, you'll let me have a sight of those papers in the safe.'

'Man!' cried Mr. Ferris, passionately, 'do you expect that I will make bargains about my daughter's life? Come, all this time I am away from her; will you go, or not? Since you must make conditions—I accept them. If the worst happens—if Angela dies—I shall become a devil; and then nothing will be left but a devil's revenge on fate.'

He mounted his horse, and rode back across the creek. Sammy Deans and his wife waited to place Granny in the charge of a domesticated black gin, then followed, walking as fast as they could to Kooralbyn, which was about a mile and a half distant.

Keziah was still watching Angela, who, during her father's absence, had remained in the same state of stupor. Sammy Deans put the horse in the buggy and drove towards Kooya, while Margaret took possession of the sick-room, making, with the aid of 'Buchan' and her own practical experience, a mental diagnosis of Angela's case, and applying such remedies as appeared patent to her understanding.

Oh, those long weary days, during which the poor girl lay still and heavy, or tossed restlessly upon her hot couch, with a sharp cough rending her frame, and pain racking her chest and limbs ; and those dragging nights, when the old man sat open-eyed and tearless by his child's bedside, watching her slightest movement, and listening with heart-rending anxiety to the delirious babblings which too clearly revealed her secret. She murmured of caresses and of wooing words ; of love, the sport of a summer's day ; and of love high and undying as the stars ; vague, poetic fancies mingled with expressions of passionate tenderness and angry jealousy, which made her father, writhing in the bitterness of his wrath, marvel that so human an emotion could exist in so pure a shrine.

And through the night-watches he prayed, as never had he prayed before, that his darling's life might be spared, yet knowing all the time that his petitions were futile, and that the priestess whom he had dedicated to the service of Art might never be consecrated in the goddess's temple.

A wild and unreasoning craving for vengeance took possession of Ferris's soul. Passing by the real despoiler of Angela's peace, it clamoured like an evil spirit against the man from whom he had received benefits, which his distorted imagination construed into insults. All his life long since they had been boys in England together, he had hated Longleat. They had started upon the race of life with the seeds of enmity in their hearts. Ferris had been puny and insignificant, Longleat healthy and well-favoured. Then disgrace had fallen upon the young Hercules, and Ferris's star had risen. As quickly again it had waned. Poverty and inappreciation had been his portion, and when years later he had come out to Australia, in the position of a beggar, his old rival had met him in that of a patron. Longleat was mighty now, and he was poor, soured and



obscure ; Longleat was the master—he was the servant ; and Longleat's daughter, in the insolence of her beauty and wealth, presumed to triumph over his shrinking lamb, and to steal away her lover.

One night, or rather early morning, just as the dawn was breaking, Angela awakened, with eyes bright and sensible, and smiled in her father's face.

'You are better, my darling!' he exclaimed rapturously. 'Oh, you will soon get well now, and we shall be happy together in Italy!'

Angela lifted her wasted hand and softly stroked his, while she gazed with wistful tenderness into his eyes.

'Father,' she said, and her voice was so faint that he was forced to stoop low before he could catch her words, 'you look so gaunt and white—you have not slept. All this time you have been watching me . . . I have had strange dreams, but they're past now, and the pain is past too, and I feel no weight or aching—only so tired. . . . Have you sent for Mrs. Ferris? I don't want her now. Tell her not to come—she will be sorry to leave Honoria. She always loved Honoria best ; she has not understood me. Ah! I've seen my own mother, standing there, beyond the mountains, all in the golden light. She is waiting—waiting to carry me away. And she smiled at me, and bade me go with her. You see, father, death is not pain—only floating upwards into a higher, clearer light. . . .'

A strange awe crept over him as he listened to her babbling. The world beyond, so manifest to her—so visionary to him—was it indeed a reality, and did his girl-wife, with all her artistic sympathies, her tender grace, and never-waning belief in his ultimate achievement of greatness, wait now in the golden light to welcome her child?

'Angel!' he whispered, 'give her a message from me. Tell her that I've done nothing—nothing ; that I am lonely and

miserable and disappointed—that there is hope for me neither in life nor in death. Tell her—if, indeed, there is a world beyond the grave—to visit me sometimes in my dreams, and teach me to believe in heaven.'

'The angels may always speak in dreams to those they love,' said Angela, solemnly. Then she closed her eyes, and he sat watching her, believing that she was sleeping.

But after a little while she opened them again and whispered :

'Father, give the picture that I have painted of myself to Mr. Barrington—the picture that I have never finished. But he will understand. . . . And when I'm dead bury me by the creek, under the cedar-tree, where we used to sit and talk. . . . Put some of the lotus lilies on my grave, and the ti-tree flowers. Let the birds and butterflies fly over my head, and when the cedar-blossoms fall, let them lie—I am only a little bush-flower too. . . . And the river will rush by me ; but I shall have learned all that it could ever tell me. And he will go sometimes, perhaps, and lay a flower on my grave—but never *her*—never tell her that I loved him. . . .'

Suddenly she caught his hand, and with an effort raised herself :

'Promise,' she whispered earnestly, 'that you will send him the picture without a word—that you will not be angry with him. I was only his little sister Angel. He loves me still—so. Promise, father, promise——'

She entreated till he bowed his head in assent to her wish. Then she closed her eyes again, and continued to murmur disjointed sentences, but so low that even to his strained ears her words were inaudible. At last, lifting her head, with bright gaze fixed upward, she said in louder tones :

'Mother! I am coming. It is sunrise, and I see you in the red light. Hold out your arms again. I am coming, mother!'

And when the day had burst, Angela was with her mother.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## MR. VALLANCY'S RETURN.

THE Torres Straits mail-boat was steaming at mild speed up the Leichardt river; she had passed the islands which studded the wider channel, and was winding between glossy plantations of bananas and fields of pine-apples. Further on, the low mangrove-covered banks were almost flush with the water; here and there, a beacon stretched out its long white arms, or a red buoy marked the whereabouts of a sandbank.

Now the hills rose more abruptly, and were covered with bungalow-like houses, overshadowed by trees, and far-back gardens which seemed to stretch into the shadow of the interminable forest. Every outline was sharply defined against a clear horizon; the westerly wind rippled the water, and the air bore that sense of exhilaration peculiar to an Australian winter's day.

The passengers on board the *Boomerang* were a motley collection. Fresh arrivals from England or the East, who discussed the doubtful charms of the landscape, bearded squatters from the coast districts, bushmen and their wives 'going South' for a trip, dingy commercial travellers and nondescript northern residents, clustered in groups upon the deck; while rising from the saloon might be heard the cackle of voices, mingled with rough laughter and imperative calls to the steward for the spirituous refreshment which is a necessity of life on board an Antipodean steam-boat.

Mr. Vallancy had just come up from the saloon, where he had been drinking a glass of brandy at the expense of a fellow-passenger. He was flushed and excited, but, nevertheless, more sturdy and respectable in appearance than

when he was last upon the scene in Leichardt's Town. The three months which he had passed in the northern wilds, away from the (to him) baleful influences of civilisation, had improved him both morally and physically. The roughness of his life, the frequent exposure to danger, the absence of temptation to nights of gambling and intemperance, and to promiscuous indulgence in spirits and tobacco, had already imparted a more manly, self-reliant expression to his face, and had stirred in his heart a softer longing for domestic happiness than he had known for years.

He had never since their marriage been so long separated from his wife ; and, as is often the case with irritable, self-indulgent natures, he missed her in a manner surprising to himself. Without her presence existence seemed flat, and lacked the daily stimulus of her scorn or languid approval, her anger or indifference. A hundred times in the day, her face, with its charm of varying expression, rose before his imagination's eye. He resolved strenuously upon an amended mode of life ; her companionship would, he reflected, make this God-forsaken abode tolerable, and he assured himself that, dependent upon her for society, and relieved from the pressure of monetary difficulties, his conduct as a husband would be everything that was exemplary.

He was on the point of writing to Mrs. Vallancy, promising altered behaviour ; he had determined upon appealing to her wifely duty, and on begging her to make the earliest arrangements possible for joining him at Gundaroo, when an anonymous letter, received one morning by the southern mail, disturbed the current of his self-communings and partially dissipated his vision of conjugal contentment.

The epistle, written in a studied, copper-plate hand, with occasional faults of diction that betrayed an uneducated source, ran as follows :

‘SIR,

‘I hope you will pardon the liberty I take in addressing you, which is done entirely for your good and for the sake of fair dealing and honour, as I believe you are not aware of the position you are in, and it goes agen my moral principles to see a gentleman who I knows to be a gentleman fooled by them as sets themselves up to make laws for poor folk, and ain’t no better than they should be.

‘It is no secret that the Premier had a fight with his colleagues to get you that appointment at Gundaroo, which I make no doubt you had your own reasons for accepting. If I may make so bold I will say that it would have been wiser if you had declined to put yourself under obligations to one who was meditating a wrong against you, and if you had stayed at home to look sharp after your handsome wife—or, better still, if you had *hoaxed the Premier by taking her with you.*

‘Now you know what everyone in Leichardt’s Town is well aware on. The whole thing was planned between Longleat and Mrs. V. before the post was offered you. They wanted to get you away to a place where you would not be likely to hear what was going on behind your back.

‘You’d best know what money you left in her possession, and whether it were enough to buy the smart gowns and the *new* jewellery that she wears, and to pay the debts that bothered her, and which I have reason for saying are discharged. And I can swear as Gospel truth that when L—— is in Leichardt’s Town, not a day passes without his crossing the water and spending hours on Emu Point. I have got no motive to serve in giving you this information except, as I said before, that I am a man of moral principles, and know your family, so that it riles me to see you gulled. And so, sir, you can take what notice you please of this letter.

‘Your humble

‘WELL-WISHER.’

A gentlemanly instinct, faint, still inherent in Vallancy, was sufficiently powerful to prompt him at first to throw the letter in the fire, and to treat its contents with the scorn that an anonymous imputation deserved. But something held him back from destroying it. He read it again, and then many times, till he knew each word by heart, and drank brandy-and-water while he read and pondered, till he almost convinced himself that the accusation had been made in good faith, and that he had in truth been befooled—a position not to be endured by a gentleman of spirit.

It was of course no secret to him that Connie's influence had procured him the appointment at Gundaroo; and he had seen no more shame in accepting the place than he had done in borrowing money from Brian Fielding. But then, in spite of her vanity and love of admiration and her openly-shown indifference to himself, he had always believed that their interests were identical, and that in her heart she entertained for him a lurking regard. Genuine doubt of his wife's fidelity had never entered his mind. A conceited man is always tenacious of his own supremacy.

Now that he had conceived the idea of mistrust, it grew with amazing rapidity. He recalled certain passionate words uttered by his wife in a moment of irritation, which confirmed the suspicion that he had been bribed to go away, and that Connie had never really intended to join him at Gundaroo. A thousand inculpatory circumstances rose to his recollection and deepened the sense of injury.

This brooding over imaginary wrong inflamed his wrath and jealousy. As days went on, he became more and more furious under the feeling of impotency. When, a fortnight later, a chance mail brought a second epistle from his anonymous correspondent, he hesitated no longer, but rode to the nearest point from which telegraphic communication with head-quarters was possible, and wired to the chief of his

department for leave of absence, a request which, as we have seen, was granted.

As he neared Leichardt's Town, Vallancy's impatience intensified till it became almost past control. He eagerly inquired at the different ports for information concerning the Premier's movements, with difficulty restraining his anxiety in order to avoid implicating his wife, then putting himself to unnecessary torture by imagining veiled innuendoes in the replies to his somewhat wild questioning.

His imagination worked wildly in conjectures concerning the relations of Longleat and Constance, and he mentally mapped out various plans of action. Should he walk boldly to the house, as though no suspicion were in his mind, or should he lie in wait and surprise a rendezvous? Then he told himself that of course the Premier was aware of his application for leave of absence; nay, the very fact of its having been granted, went a little way towards quelling his apprehensions.

He cursed his folly in not having surprised the position unawares. Doubtless all precautions had been taken, and he should find Connie armed at every point. Finally he determined to be guided by her manner as to the course he would pursue. He almost resolved that he would bid her prepare to accompany him to Gundaroo by the next boat, and if she refused, he would show her the anonymous letters and tax her boldly with her guilt. He would crush her with fierce reproaches, and would then cast her off in her shame. With all a coward's hesitation he shrank from personal encounter with Longleat; it would be easier to confront the woman who had wronged him, and who was more or less in his power.

The steamer carried the English mail, and a greater crowd than usual had assembled to greet her arrival. Friendly handkerchiefs were waved from the various dwellings which

sloped to the water's edge, as she steamed slowly round Emu Point, and prepared to moor at the wharf which was situated close to the ferry. Taking advantage of a momentary stoppage of the screw, and of the confusion on deck, Vallancy threw his portmanteau into one of the small skiffs which crowded round the steamer, and bade the boatman row him to the ferry-steps, calculating that he would thus gain a few minutes and avoid recognition on the wharf. It was just possible that his wife might not have been warned of his arrival.

He threw the boatman a shilling, and, leaving his portmanteau at the ferry-house, walked with beating heart up the hill and along the white road, past the row of neat venetian houses, with their trim gardens and sheltering foliage of pine and bamboo, till he reached the wicket-gate which admitted him to his wife's abode.

The veranda was empty, and the windows of the drawing-room were closed. Like all Australian dwellings, the cottage might easily have been entered unperceived. Skirting the veranda, he caught a glimpse of the light drapery of Mrs. Vallancy's handmaiden as she stooped to spread some fine laces upon the grass at the rear of the house; but of his wife's presence there was no sign.

He softly pushed open one of the venetian shutters, and peered into the drawing-room. The strong scent of gardenias—a perfume which irresistibly recalled Connie—floated towards him; but she was not there.

The piano was unclosed, and a library novel lay with a page turned down upon the sofa. With the quick instinct of jealousy, Vallancy noticed some unfamiliar expensive trifles scattered about the tables. On the mantelshelf were two pink tickets for a performance by some operatic artists, lately arrived from Sydney, which he divined that the Premier had given her.



‘Constance,’ he called almost below his breath, half-hoping, half-dreading that she would reply; but there was no answer.

He looked into the dining-room, and then into her bedroom, which was empty like the rest; but here there were signs of recent occupation. Her handkerchief lay upon the floor, her garden-hat hung upon the wall. In a tray upon the toilet-table there were several costly rings, and a large locket of plain gold with a cross of pearls upon the oval, which he did not remember to have seen before.

He lingered for some minutes in the chamber, turning over her various properties with a strange mingling of tenderness and fury. Then he returned to the drawing-room, and proceeded to inspect it more particularly, seizing upon the loose notes in Mrs. Vallancy’s work-basket, in the hope of discovering a clue to her whereabouts. They were merely trivial, social and business communications, and told him nothing. There was a large coloured photograph of Thomas Longleat in a velvet frame upon her writing-table. In a fit of fury Vallancy seized it and tore the print to atoms. Presently his attention was attracted by a blue official-looking envelope, resting face downwards upon the table; it was sealed with the arms of Leichardt’s Land. He turned it over, and saw that it was addressed in the Premier’s handwriting to Mrs. Vallancy, and marked ‘Immediate.’

He tore open the letter and read it eagerly. His face changed; a muttered curse escaped his lips, and he fell heavily upon a chair as though he had been struck by a blow.

The letter contained the confirmation of his wife’s guilt.

CHAPTER XXXII.

*'IF I HAVE BEEN BAD TO YOU, IT IS ENDED NOW.'*

MRS. VALLANCY did not often leave home for the day. The invitations she received generally issued from the borderland of Leichardtstonian society, and were only accepted when she was safe from observation. In spite of her defiance of conventionality, she had been clever enough to retain an insecure footing upon the upper social stratum, and was careful not to exhibit herself in second-rate company.

Among her own sex, the only intimate associates she possessed were ladies of Bohemian proclivities of whom she was ashamed; it was safer to receive the visits of gentlemen, but of these Longleat's constant attendance deprived her. She had sickened of her empire over this one heart, and just now was very lonely. It was a relief and pleasure when, upon the very morning of the day her husband returned, she had received a warm-hearted note from an old school friend—the wife of a newly-elected member, who had lately arrived from the Far West, and had taken a house in Leichardt's Town for the session—inviting her to spend a long day, that they might talk over old times.

Mrs. Vallancy could not afford to throw away an opportunity of rehabilitating her position, and the renewal of this friendship seemed to present desirable possibilities. Apart from prudential considerations, her heart warmed to the associations of her youth. Ease, freedom from debt, and the possession of ready money, were conditions of life pleasant indeed to her, but the penalty she paid filled her soul at intervals with feelings approaching to loathing and horror.

Oh to breathe for a day in a comparatively moral atmosphere !

She did not demur at accepting the hasty invitation, saw her friend's children, babbled of womanly domestic interests, was condoled with upon her husband's absence, and from the cool veranda watched the big Torres Straits boat steam up the river, and waved her handkerchief to a friend of her friend's, presumably on board, little dreaming who else stood upon the deck.

It will be seen that she had not received Longleat's letter with the intimation of her husband's probable return.

She was driven by her friend into Leichardt's Town, where she invested in various articles of millinery, and was then dropped at the ferry-steps, whence she took the boat to Emu Point, and walked leisurely to her own home, congratulating herself upon the prospect of a quiet evening, with a new novel and immunity from Mr. Longleat's company—for he had told her the night before that a ministerial engagement would detain him upon the north side.

'I wonder whether there will be a letter from Edward this mail,' she murmured, as she walked up the gravel-path, and then began to hum lightly to herself the refrain of a nursery ditty which she had been singing to her friend's children.

She looked very handsome : the shadow of her girlhood softened her face ; the haggard lines had gone from about her mouth, her cheeks were flushed and dimpled, and her eyes were bright with exercise. She stepped springily on to the veranda, and, pushing open the drawing-room door, entered.

It was nearly six o'clock, and the winter's day was on the wane. A golden gleam shone in through the half-closed shutters, and fell upon the figure of a man crouched upon the sofa, with a crumpled letter in his hand.

The room swam before Constance's eyes. Her heart seemed to leap up in agonised excitement, and then fell with a heavy despair.

'Edward,' she cried, staggering back, and indeed at the moment half in doubt whether it was her husband or his wraith.

'It is I,' he answered, divining her thought, and regarding her with a helpless gaze in which wrath, consternation, and reproach were strangely blended. 'I have come down from the North. You need not be afraid. I am not going to hurt you. I shall not throttle or stab you, like a husband in a book.'

'I—you—you startled me horribly,' she faltered. 'I thought you were at Gundaroo.'

'Safe out of sight and hearing,' he returned, with a ghastly attempt at irony. 'It must be awkward, under some circumstances, to find a husband unexpectedly arrived when he is believed to be two thousand miles away. Let me advise you. It is not prudent to leave home even for a day without taking precautions to lock up your trinkets, and to provide against letters being opened in your absence.'

'I—I don't know what you mean,' she said, blanching visibly, as she recognised the handwriting upon the paper which he held in his hand. 'You have been reading a letter of mine. What right had you to open it? Give it to me at once.'

'By ——!' said Vallancy, starting up. 'There are no bounds to your effrontery. You know that this letter is from your lover. You know that you are a guilty woman!'

She made a snatch at the paper which he held above his head.

'Let me see it,' she cried. 'How dare you touch what is mine!'

He placed it close to the fire upon pretence of burning

it, then quietly withdrew the missive, folded and conveyed it to his breast-pocket.

'I will not destroy this,' he said. 'It is the proof of your guilt. Well for me that I have learned the truth—that you can fool me no longer. . . . You did not know that I was coming down. I am glad of that. I have taken you un-awares. If it hadn't been so, you would have been ready for me, and I might have been fooled into believing that you were an honest woman.'

As he spoke in sharp incisive tones, so unlike his usual manner, Constance uttered a little cry, and cowered back against the wall. She made no denial, but gazed at him for a moment with the look of a wild animal at bay; then, though she trembled in every limb, reared her head aloft with a gesture of defiance, and stood erect with her eyes upon the ground.

As a bride, her husband's violence had cowed her. Later she had learned to despise it. Now it seemed to her that the melodramatic situation had given birth to a certain spurious dignity in his voice and manner. At the moment, his insignificant personality appeared merged in the abstract right which his moral attitude represented. She was awed into belief in his sincerity. There was still something manly in his nature. For the first time she realised the sharp barrier which divides wrong of intent and of action.

'You know that you are a guilty woman,' he said again.

'No, no!' she exclaimed faintly; not guilty—not as you think. Oh, Edward! spare me.'

'Spare you!' he cried . . . '*you!* . . .'

He came near her, and stood before her, his eyes—it seemed to her, when for a second she raised her own to his face—scorching into her very soul. . . .

She turned very white and grew faint as she listened to the words which followed. A low cry broke from her lips;

then the mental agony which she endured reacted upon her frame and braced it to the rigidity of a stone.

Vallancy ceased. He moved away from her, and there was silence in the room, while he, leaning against the mantelshelf, watched her as she stood with bowed head and lowered eyes. Presently he spoke again, but in accents more of reproach than of anger.

'And I put faith in you, Connie—in spite of all your faults, your selfishness, and vanity. I never believed that you were wholly bad. . . . I thought that whatever misfortunes happened to us we would hold together, and be true to each other, and share and share alike. I have meant lately to be a different sort of husband to you. While I have been living alone at Gundaroo I have thought over the past and have regretted much that has happened between us . . . but you might have made allowances. What is a man to do when all the world is against him? I may have nagged at you sometimes, but, on the whole, you had not much to complain of. I never growled at you when you amused yourself; and though you took no pains to make me happy, I was always willing that you should have your pleasures. I thought that it was to be "give and take" between us, and I never suspected you. . . . That night you came down with Longleat in the coach I'd as soon have believed evil of an innocent babe. And to think that you two were plotting together that I was to be shunted off to Gundaroo while you carried on your damnable intrigue! . . . You have appealed to me—like a woman—to spare you. What do you expect? What do you hope for from me? You have calculated and sinned deliberately, and you must know what are the wages of your sin. I have no mercy for you.'

'Are you so stainless? Am I so wicked?' said Constance, 'Think what you please. I will make no further protesta-

tion. Our paths divide now, and we must go our different ways. You and I are parted for ever—at least, that is well. . . . Oh, what might not my life have been but for you! she cried, more passionately. 'Is it not you who have made me what I am? You believe me utterly vile. I am not viler than during all the years of my married life. You taught me first to deceive, and that right and wrong are only what *seems*, not what *is*. The good that there was in me has died slowly. You have starved it. You hardened me to shame. . . . When a woman has once endured loathing—disgust beyond words—the rest is as nothing. . . . I never knew before that your standard of virtue was so high, and mine so low. You did not object to take money from men who wished to be my lovers. You held me very cheap. I have not to thank you if I have kept myself—believe me or not, as you choose—so far blameless. You knew that it was for my sake Longleat gave you the Gundaroo appointment, and you made no scruple about accepting it. You never loved me. What consequence is it to you that I am miserable or reckless? We understand each other. Let matters remain as they are, and do you go back to Gundaroo.'

'You are shameless indeed,' cried Vallancy, 'if you imagine that I will allow you to live the life you lead under the shelter of my name!'

Constance was silent for a moment. She gave her shoulders a defiant shrug, and smiled a queer sort of smile. She was thinking of her diamonds and other trinkets, of cheques which had been cashed, of which the money was in her possession; and then she remembered how she had that morning received a passionate letter from Brian Fielding, imploring her to fly to him in Melbourne.

'You shall reap the full harvest of your sin,' continued Vallancy. 'Every finger in Leichardt's Town shall be pointed in scorn at you.'

'What is that to me now?' she cried. 'Has not society scorned me already without due cause? At least I can defy it. There are no more hollow appearances to keep up—no need to mask what I feel. Who knows how I have suffered—struggled? Who would have stirred a finger to guard me? Let me go. This is your house. I will leave it to-night. Will you bid me good-bye?'

Vallancy looked at her in a bewildered way.

'It is getting late,' he said; 'I don't want to turn you out of doors. You had better stay here to-night. I will let you remain in peace. I am going to the other side.'

He got up and took his hat. The room was almost dark; the sun had sunk, and the hearth was cheerless, and the air cold. Mrs. Vallancy moved across the room, and the two stood facing each other. She shivered.

'I will leave your house to-night,' she repeated. 'I can find shelter somewhere. Bah!' she added, with a jarring laugh; 'how tragic it all should be, and yet how utterly flat it is! We have been husband and wife for ten years, and we part now with as little show of regret as though we were to meet again at dinner. You cannot keep up the face of outraged honour; it is beyond you. Well; it is better that we should not be sentimental—but, haven't you a word to say to me, Edward, before I go?'

She stretched out her hand to the writing-table, and lighted the tapers upon it.

'There,' she said; 'now we can look at each other—for the last time, perhaps.'

The candles shed a faint illumination upon her figure, and upon a collection of photographs and miniatures that were arranged upon the wall. Among them was a portrait in crayons, roughly executed by Vallancy himself of their child, which had died when it was a year old. The baby eyes gazing at her with all the unconscious appeal of infancy



touched the deepest chord in Connie's heart, if, indeed, she may be said to have possessed such an article. A film gathered before her own eyes, and her frame shook with a suppressed sob, while she dropped her hands with a gesture of quiet despair.

'We have been husband and wife,' she said, and all the recklessness had gone from her voice. 'I am baby's mother; nothing can alter that. When you have hard thoughts of me, think that I might have been different if the child had lived or if you had been kinder. Oh, it is because we women have no independent life—because we are the mere chattels of human brutes, fawning upon our masters when they smile, and slinking away from them when they are angry, that we become false and bad. I might have been a true wife and a happy mother if I had married the man I loved. . . . I thought of that to-day when I was sitting with Agnes Stewart, watching her with her children at play—and I used to despise her when we were girls because she was commonplace and plain. Fate has been kind to her and cruel to me. Why should I have been singled out for rough usage? I, who in my girlhood was always petted and flattered? . . . If you had been gentle with me—if you had not frightened me at first and then made me have a contempt for you— Do you recollect the first time you swore at me and struck me? . . . And I grew to hate you. The more familiar I became with you, the worse it was. I knew that you cheated people, and all the time that I was helping you I loathed the thing—and I— And when baby died there seemed nothing left. If I had not flirted I should always have been thinking, thinking—and that was terrible. . . . But you could never understand; I might go on talking till doomsday and it would be of no use—and why should I wish to excuse myself? That is the misery—to go on for ever and ever with a blank wall of hopelessness

before you. . . . If I have been bad to you, it is ended now. I don't ask your forgiveness ; I don't offer to forgive you for any wrong you may have done me. . . . Let us each take up life again, apart from each other, and try to make the best of what is left.'

'You wish me to apply for a divorce,' said Vallancy, 'so that you may be free to marry Longleat.'

'Oh, I don't know what I wish,' said Constance, dreamily, then shuddered violently. 'No, no,' she murmured. 'If I could have my heart's desire for one hour and then die, that would be best for me.'

'I will never give you your freedom,' said Vallancy, slowly and deliberately, misunderstanding the drift of her last words. 'I'll lay my yoke upon you till I die. A man is not made of wood any more than a woman. But what is the use of talking? I never set up for a saint ; I did not expect to find you one ; I was ever ready to excuse you if you were a little worse than others. I knew that I had disappointed you. But I loved you : I was always true to you. It was your selfishness and indifference that drove me to drink. . . . Now I don't care what becomes of me. Let me have my revenge upon Longleat, and then the sooner I go to the devil the better.'

She looked at him keenly from under her lashes, as though to satisfy herself how much of his language was empty bombast ; then turned from him and passed through an inner door.

'Good-bye, Edward,' she said, pausing for a moment upon the threshold. 'Good-bye.'

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH SAMMY DEANS.

VALLANCY did not attempt to follow his wife, but staggered out of the room and walked blindly down the garden-path, like a man in a dream.

He passed through the little gate and gazed helplessly up and down the road, uncertain how to proceed. As the latch clicked behind him, a slouching figure emerged from the shadow of a tree, and a white leering face, totally unfamiliar to him, confronted him in the dusky light.

'D—n you,' cried Vallancy. 'What are you doing here? Why don't you get out of my way?'

Sammy Deans, for it was he, looked in nowise disconcerted by this rough address.

'Mr. Vallancy,' he replied coolly, 'you look as though something had gone agen the grain with you. I have been waiting here to have a word with you in private, ever since I see'd your good lady go in. I have got summat particular to tell you.'

'Well,' said Vallancy, his attention arrested by a certain sinister significance conveyed by Deans's look and manner, 'tell me your business, and be quick about it, for I am in a hurry. What is your name? I do not remember ever having seen you before.'

'Happen my name will keep,' said Sam, imperturbably.

It were not about myself that I had a mind to talk. You have come down all on a sudden from the north, sir. It ain't but a short time since they made you police magistrate at Gundaroo. Maybe you don't like the place, or happen you have got family business, or you've had letters that have called you down.'

'Yes,' said Vallancy, looking cautiously at the man; 'I have had letters that have obliged me to come to Leichardt's Town. Letters upon family business. Perhaps you can tell me who wrote them.'

'That must be best known to yourself, sir,' said Sam, with equal caution.

'Come,' said Vallancy, roughly, 'I can see by your face that you know more about these letters than you choose to say at present. They were written anonymously, but I have not the least doubt that you are perfectly aware of their authorship. Well, whoever my correspondent may be, I am at least indebted to him for correct information. What will loosen your tongue? You need not hesitate to acknowledge your work. I cannot indict you for libel, however much I might wish to do so.'

'It's a queer thing,' said Sam, reflectively, 'but I've seen it afore now; no matter what a woman is, so long as a man has got her to wife, he is wild with rage if she throws him over. I should have thought it wur a good riddance to bad rubbish; and summat of a satisfaction to have the world open again to choose from.'

'Stop that!' cried Vallancy, whose temper was not in a state to bear irritation. 'What the devil do I care what you think? I suppose you want to be paid for your information, and if so I had better tell you at once that I will not give you a farthing.'

''Twur a friend of mine who wrote those letters,' answered Sam, taking no notice of Vallancy's remark. 'He is a clever chap, and pretty smart at putting two and two together. There are many things kep' dark that he knows. I dare say he could tell you now that there would be a change of Ministry before long. You would be surprised to hear that it rests with him whether Longleat carries his Loan Bill and goes sailing off to England to be knighted by her

Majesty, or is kicked out of the Treasury for a scoundrel. No one 'ud believe it if he was told, but it is true for all that.'

'What!' exclaimed Vallancy, startled into interest. 'I am informed by everyone that Longleat has an overwhelming majority.'

'That may be. He has strutted, and ranted, and bribed, and made a shout of progress, honesty, impartiality, till he has got all Leichardt's Land to believe in him as though he were a god. But suppose that my friend had private information concerning the Premier's past life, that would damn this hero as a rascal, a thief, say—a murderer—an old hand—where would his popularity be then? Gone like a whiff of smoke.'

'That would depend upon whether your friend's information was reliable, and whether he could bring forward evidence to support it,' said Vallancy.

'Suppose it were newspaper evidence,' whispered Sam. 'The report of a trial and conviction, eh? Suppose that, with a few inquiries, Thomas Longleat, Premier, could be identified with a man bearing another name, who was sent out to Western Australia twenty-two years ago? What should you think of that? A charge brought up in the House—Lord, what a stir it would make! If anyone had a grudge against him, and wanted the opportunity for revenge—— As my friend said to me——'

'Oh, drop all that humbug about your friend,' exclaimed Vallancy. 'Look here; let us understand each other. Of course I know that you wrote those anonymous letters. You had better own up to it. I don't suppose that you sent them out of goodwill to me, unless, indeed, as you say, you really did it for the sake of my family. If that is the case, my family never did me a better service, and my worst enemy could not have hit me a harder blow. Tell me your

name, my good man. I don't want to be ungracious to you. Let me know who you are, and I may perhaps be able to understand you.'

Sammy Deans somewhat reluctantly owned to his personality.

'Are you not the man who was sentenced to four months' imprisonment for stealing Mr. Longleat's cattle?'

Sammy Deans acknowledged the indictment.

'Then I am beginning to see through you. Your hatred for Longleat is as deep as mine. You would do him an evil turn if you could. You would make a tool of me to work out some malicious scheme that you have plotted against him.'

'Sir,' said Deans, 'you have had a conversation with your wife; she has acknowledged that what I have told you is true. You speak very short. I have given you information about your wife's goings-on that should ha' been received gratefully. You are a gentleman; your honour has been trampled upon. You have a better reason for wishing to crush Longleat than I have. You cannot slink away up north again. Folks would call you a coward. You cannot try horse-whipping, for you would get the worst of it. He is thick-skinned and powerful. Money is no odds to him, but reputation is everything. You can hurt him worse than death if you choose, or if you do not choose I will hit him instead of you. I've my grudge against him, but it ain't no concern of mine which of us punishes him, except that I am a dramatic sort of chap; I like a *dénoomong*, as the Mossoos say. I could take my evidence straight to Middleton, who would not be scrupulous in using it, and would pay me for it better than you will.'

'I am surprised that you have not been to Middleton already,' said Vallancy, suspiciously.

'I'm a dramatic chap,' repeated Sam. 'As I said afore,

Shakespeare, the immortal bard, and the footlights. All the world's a stage. Each man owes it to art, to play his part decently, as old Ferris would say. Melodrama—that is what they call it in fine language. The plot is thickening. There's a villain in it, and an artful woman, and an injured husband. The low chap: he that is the instrument of the rest, and finds the papers, and plays second fiddle, that's me. I hain't been eddicated up to play the hero. He ought to be a gentleman. That is your part, Mr. Vallancy. You'll cut a better figure before the audience than Sammy Deans, the gaol-bird.'

'That's all d——d humbug!' said Vallancy. 'Look here; if you have got any evidence against the Premier that is worth having I'll pay you for it—do you understand? We'll settle the price when I know what your information is. You have got some reason for not going straight to Middleton. He knows you in the police-court, I'll be bound, and you are afraid of being shown up. Let me see your papers, and I'll name my figure.'

'Not so fast, Mr. Vallancy,' said Sam. 'My evidence is right enough, and far too valuable to be let out of my hands easily. And happen it were summat of that sort that kept me from going straight to Middleton, who has got a grudge against me on account of a little business up in the Ubi district; he'd be friendly enough when he knowed what I had got to tell him. I ain't afraid of being shown up, but I have my own reasons for keeping quiet just now.'

At that moment a passer-by—one of the Treasury clerks on his way home—brushed against Mr. Vallancy and his companion. He eyed the police magistrate of Gundaroo, uncertain in the half light as to his identity.

'Hullo, Vallancy!' he cried at last. 'It *is* you. I heard something about your leave. Upon my word, you were lucky to get it so soon; but I suppose the Government is on

its p's and q's just now ; and then we all know what a friend your wife is of the Premier's. You have come to take Mrs. Vallancy up north, I suppose.'

'No,' growled Vallancy. 'Don't you insult me by talking about my wife and the Premier. I am not going to take her to Gundaroo. We are best apart. . . . I am sorry I can't talk to you just now. I have some business to attend to. I'll come and see you to-morrow or the next day. Good-night.'

The gentleman looked a little mystified for a moment ; then a flash of intelligence crossed his face, and he passed on, the first to spread abroad the news of Mrs. Vallancy's actual disgrace.

Vallancy turned to Deans.

'I cannot stand here with you in the road to discuss this matter. Isn't there any place you know, where we could be quiet for an hour? You need not look at my house. I am not going there any more to-night, and I don't care about being seen with you across the water. Is there any pot-house over here, where there is a private room, and where the people will not recognise me?'

'There's the Banana,' said Sam, thoughtfully ; 'if you don't mind the tramp. Come, sir, it's South Leichardt's Town way.'

The two men walked for a little distance up the dusty white hill, then turned into a rugged road which wound round the edge of the cliff. Upon one side, scattered villas alternated with paddocks overgrown by young gum-trees and prickly-pear ; on the other, the rocks sloped in natural terraces to the river—a dark blue semicircular riband ; while beyond lay the town, with its twinkling lights coming out one by one as the darkness deepened.

They walked on for a mile or more, till, at the junction of the Kooya coach-road with that leading to Emu Point, they



came upon a rough bush-inn, standing apart upon an isolated green, and surrounded by a deep veranda, above which was a sign-board illumined by a kerosene lantern, representing in vivid colouring of green, yellow, and magenta, a banana-tree in fruit.

The bar, occupied at present by a black-fellow and two bullock-drivers, was at one side of the building. At the other, there was a little parlour quite deserted, into which Sammy Deans conducted Mr. Vallancy. It was evident that business was not brisk at the Banana.

'This is where I hangs out,' said Sam, drawing a chair to the log fire which illumined the dingy place, and proceeding to fill a short black pipe. 'You'll have summat to drink, sir, won't you? We shall come to better terms over a nobbler apiece, and they won't doctor the grog if you order it in the bottle.'

Vallancy nodded, and a bottle of cognac was called for. Vallancy poured out a glass which he drank almost neat, while Sammy Deans mixed a milder decoction, and settled himself comfortably at a corner of the fireplace with the air of a narrator. Vallancy took a cigar from a case in his pocket, and began to smoke also, every now and then drinking another sip of brandy. The haggard lines of anxiety and wrath which had furrowed his face dispersed slowly under the influence of warmth and stimulant.

As Sammy Deans proceeded with the story which in the madness of grief and rage Mr. Ferris had disclosed, his whole countenance became animated by curiosity and eagerness, and he forgot his wife's falsity and the faint stirrings of manly remorse which her reproaches had aroused in his breast, in the exciting interest of the tale.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## NEWS BY THE MAIL.

'THE English mail is in! The English mail is in!' was the cry which sounded in Barrington's ears about five o'clock on that same afternoon, as he lounged down King Street behind the excited crowd that was hurrying down towards the Post-Office.

Both within and without, the building seemed a scene of animation.

Ruddy emigrants, noticeable by reason of their eager faces and uncolonial garments; bushmen in cabbage-tree hats and breeches; women with children in their arms or toddling at their skirts; lost creatures, in tawdry finery, whose coarse, hard countenances were softened by a ray of sentiment at the thought of 'home;' stalwart Englishmen, browned by the tropical sun, who, though prosperous, yet eagerly yearned for tidings of distant friends; old hands, who had inquired oft and anxiously at the same window—all these eagerly demanded if there were any letters from England for them; while apart, little groups, or isolated men and women, devoured with their eyes the thin sheets of foreign paper which fluttered in a light breeze—some smiling, others weeping, as the news might be good or ill.

Each face, young or old, dejected or jubilant, seemed in part to reveal its own history. With the impartial interest of a social philosopher, Barrington stood for a moment at the outskirts of the crowd, and watched the scene.

A middle-aged woman accompanied by a young girl had just returned from the window holding a letter, which she had already opened, in her hand, and as she walked slowly

past Barrington, running her eyes down the closely-written pages, she exclaimed to her companion :

‘It’s from Annie ! Now there’ll be news of our Jem !’ then a moment later uttered a faint shriek, and, clutching the girl’s arm, directed her attention to the opening paragraph of the letter.

There was a rush of ejaculations and sobs close to Barrington’s ear. What had happened ? Only a railway accident to the ‘Flying Scotchman,’ thirty lives lost—and Jem was stoker of the train.

There seemed an intense grimness in the sight of this desolation, which the news, many weeks after date, carried to these two poor hearts, so many thousand miles distant from the scene of the disaster. For the first time Barrington realised fully the bridge of human interests and emotions which connects the mother-land with her far-off daughter colony. He began to speculate with a certain troubled curiosity upon the probable tidings of his own friends and relations, which the mail had brought for him. His heart stirred at the thought of his mother’s letter—would she write coldly, or with affection ? Did she miss him ? Did she regret having bidden him leave her ? But it was vain to wonder. There was no spontaneity in Lady Alice Barrington’s moods.

He inquired of a bystander if there would be any town delivery that evening.

No, only the Governor, the Ministers, and such like big-wigs would get their letters sent to them that night. He would have to ask here if he wanted his.

Barrington took his place near the window, and, waiting his turn, made his demand. Two packets were handed out to him. One addressed in a clerkly hand to ‘Hardress Barrington, Esq.,’ and marked ‘immediate ;’ the other inclosed in a thin envelope deeply bordered with black.

He started and blanched at the sign of mourning, then reassured himself as he recognised his mother's handwriting. One of his nephews, or perhaps a cousin, was dead. Thank God, nothing had happened to the old lady. Barrington's heart grew tender at the thought of his mother.

He put the letters in his pocket, and, hailing a hansom, dashed down to an hotel, where in the solitude of a private apartment he opened first that from his mother.

It was written in the pointed characters so fashionable a quarter of a century ago, and formally expressed in studied phrases, which seemed to indicate that epistolary correspondence was no light matter to Lady Alice Barrington.

This was the letter :

‘ Castle Barrington,  
‘ 20th April.

‘ MY DEAREST HARDRESS,

‘ Never till now have I realised the immense distance by which we are separated. It is hardly conceivable that when this letter reaches you, the mournful intelligence which it bears will be ranked in England among events of the past, and that we shall have so far recovered from the state of bewildered misery into which we have been plunged, as to be able to form definite plans for the future.

‘ But to state as briefly as possible the terrible calamity which has befallen us. Last week we received an intimation that scarlet fever had broken out in Mr. Hawkins's preparatory school for Eton, where, as you know, Lionel's two sons were placed. Lionel, who was always anxious and perhaps a trifle over-fussy, where the health of his children were concerned, went down himself to bring them home. They travelled back by that ill-fated Flying Scotchman, which came into collision with a goods train near Grandchester. Thirty persons were killed, and among them my beloved

son and my two grandchildren, their bodies mangled in a manner upon which my harrowed feelings will not permit me to dwell. As regards the catastrophe, the papers will furnish you with full particulars.

‘Eleanor, who was at that time expecting her confinement, was so overwhelmed by grief and horror at the news abruptly communicated to her, that shortly afterwards she gave premature birth to a son, who, perhaps happily, survived his father’s death but a few hours. Eleanor is now in a most critical condition, and every moment which I devote to this letter is robbed from my melancholy watch by her bedside. Indeed I feel that Divine grace alone enables my weak frame to support the burden of anguish which has fallen upon me. Alas ! I fear a terrible reaction ; but it is my prayer that the same grace may sustain me till you return to enter worthily into the high and responsible position to which it has pleased God to elect you—truly His ways are inscrutable—and that I may be inspired with words of counsel and encouragement, which you will not disdain to accept from your mother. I care not then how soon I am permitted to join the beloved ones to whom my earthly happiness has been mainly due.

‘My son, you are now in a direct line the last male representative of your race. Upon you devolves the old title which your brother and father, and their ancestors for generations, have borne so nobly.

‘I remember that when, after that wretched episode which resulted in your retirement from the Guards, I urged so strenuously your departure for Australia, you accused me somewhat bitterly of having sacrificed the tenderness of motherhood upon the altar of family pride. Recollect that the Barrington motto, ‘Death rather than dishonour,’ has been the religion of my youth and of my old age ; and that from my earliest childhood I was taught to reverence the

name of Barrington as the type of truth and nobility.\* From the hour of my marriage it became my holiest mission to preserve that name unsullied. Think then, what could have been my feelings when your extravagance and dissipated habits—I will use no harsher terms—threatened to disgrace it? Your English career was practically closed; there was no prospect but ruin before you; an unpleasant notoriety was attached to your name. I had faith in the latent manliness and energy in your character, which I felt might be developed by the impetus of a fresh opening in a distant land; and I believed that, once separated from the baleful influences that beset you in London, you might retrieve the past and carve out a new and honourable career.

‘Now, by the death of your brother and of his two sons, all the circumstances of your life are changed. To Sir Hardress Barrington society will readily pardon what it would have been slow to condone in the case of a penniless younger son. Come home at once. New interests and responsibilities await you. Meet them nobly. Should our dear Eleanor be taken from us, you will become the natural guardian of Lionel’s daughter. Mr. Burnley tells me that your presence is urgently desirable. Lose not a day in taking your passage to England. Mr. Burnley is writing to you on matters of business. I will add no more except to assure you that you will be received with open arms, and that my prayers are with you.

‘Your loving mother,

‘ALICE BARRINGTON.’

Barrington smiled grimly as he refolded the letter.

‘Le roi est mort, vive le roi,’ he muttered. ‘Poor mother! it is a bitter pill for her to swallow, but she takes it at a gulp.

\* Lady Alice Clarence was, upon the female side, a cousin of her husband, Sir Lionel Barrington.

I was right ; the family honour is her fetish. Lionel dead ! I cannot realise it. I have always thought him a prig, but he was a downright good fellow when you pierced the crust, and we were fond of each other after a fashion. I think he would have liked me better if I had been a parson, and had settled down in the family living ; and next to that he preferred me in Australia. . . . He was better fitted for the English county magnate business than I shall ever be. . . . My mother bows to the decrees of Providence, but she admits that they are inscrutable. What possible reason could the Almighty have had for mangling those poor children ? It will be a hard nut for her faith to crack ; but the title, such as it is, she fancies a sort of Apostolic unction. The head of the house of Barrington can do no wrong. . . . It is a queer world ! I was a beggar yesterday, skulking about the Premier's back gate. I am a baronet to-day. Not that it will make any difference in Longleat's sentiments. . . . Poor little chaps !' he added, with a regretful pang at the thought of his nephews' bonnie faces—the urchins he had dandled on his knees at Castle Barrington and tipped at school. 'It is hard lines upon them that they should not have their innings. I don't think that I'd have grudged little Li the handle to his name. How will Honoria receive this news ? No need to marry her now for the sake of the Tarrangella tin-mine. What will my mother say to the introduction of alien blood into the pure Barrington stream ? Honoria is a Radical at heart. She will never worship at the ancestral shrine. . . . There's something in that girl that wakes the devil in me. Old Ferris was right, perhaps ; the taint of the mother——'

He broke the thread of his thoughts by tearing open the lawyer's letter. Mr. Burnley briefly explained the circumstances of Sir Lionel's death, the disposition of his property, and concluded by strongly urging the necessity for Hard-

ress's return to England, expressing a doubt as to the ultimate effect of the shock she had sustained upon the fragile constitution of Lady Alice Barrington.

'Her thoughts seem now entirely centred on you,' wrote the lawyer. 'Ever since your departure she has been consumed with feverish anxiety for news of you. Her grief for Sir Lionel is silent and repressed. You represent her earthly source of consolation. She said to me yesterday, "If I could only see my son Hardress happily married and taking his place worthily here, I should die in peace." You know your mother's reticence and unwillingness to own to any weakness; but I shrewdly suspect that remorse has weighed upon her ever since she advised your banishment to Australia.'

Barrington was deeply affected by these allusions to his mother. From his childhood this beautiful, undemonstrative woman had exercised a powerful though passive influence over his emotions. He had loved her even when he had been bitter against her; and now a yearning came over him to see her, to gratify the proud expectations that she had once cherished of him. The grey walls of his old home rose in his mind, and awakened in it a keen longing to return. He breathed again the atmosphere in which he had been born and reared, and marvelled that he could have existed elsewhere. His thoughts went drifting back amid old scenes and companions—the men of his regiment, the women who had smiled upon him—would they be gracious to him once more?

And then his mind turned towards Honoria. He grew hot and cold: his breath rose and fell rapidly: his heart throbbed. It became borne in upon him that they two no longer stood upon the same footing. The shock of his



sudden social elevation, and the influence of his mother's affectionate exhortation, and of the prayers and blessings breathed forth from her letter, seemed to have changed entirely his moral attitude towards the girl whom he at once loved and despised.

Yesterday, he had deemed it no sacrifice to make Honoria his wife. To-night, with the vision of his mother's sorrowful face fresh in his imagination—as he thought of her revived hopes for his future career ; of the duties and responsibilities that now devolved upon him ; of the broad Barrington acres ; the refined society which had contributed to the pleasure of his old life ; of the new existence opening before him, with its possibilities of great achievement and its certainty of social rehabilitation, in which marriage represented such an important feature—he trembled and wavered.

Was not the price to be paid for the joy of calling Honoria his own, heavier than, under the circumstances, could reasonably be demanded from him? The revenues of the great Tarrangella tin-mine were nothing to him now, and the advantages of a union with Miss Longleat were no longer patent.

Could he ask Lady Alice Barrington to open her arms to the daughter of a Radical bullock-driver? Was Honoria's mother such an ancestress as future Barringtons might acknowledge without shame?

A thousand times, No.

Then he reflected upon the manifold inconsistencies in Honoria's nature—her frankness and boldness pushed to the very verge of indiscretion ; her scorn of conventionalities ; her impatience of the dictates of her petty world ; her thirst for experience ; her susceptibility to argument and entreaty ; her self-reliance and yet her proneness to be dominated by the passionate impulses of the moment ; her freedom of speech, and a certain *abandon* of action and manner to be

attributed to the influences which from her birth had surrounded her, but which, in the course of Barrington's experience, had never been combined with the traditional reserve of a carefully-trained young lady who may only be approached in the conventional manner sanctioned by polite society.

It had been arranged that they were to meet that evening at the usual trysting-place.

Could he venture to broach to her a plan of immediate flight? How far would it be possible to overcome her scruples—to gloss over dishonour by honeyed phrases and specious arguments—the imperative necessity for his return; the difficulty of triumphing over her father's opposition to his suit; the desirability of deferring the ceremony of marriage till they reached Sydney—England—the break from all old ties which would leave her untrammelled by the past. . . . Could he dare whisper in her ear promises of devotion, of lifelong fidelity—of marriage in the sight of God—the hackneyed jargon which rises so glibly to the lips of a fashionable profligate?

Barrington dined alone. He was in a queer, excited mood; yet 'mid all his excitement there ran the regretful thought of his mother's grief, of the sorrowing widow, of the dead boys.

He had been engaged in a vague way for that evening, but remained at the hotel, having a notion that it would be indecorous to show himself in general society. Below in the coffee-room there was a meeting of rowdies. He could hear rough voices raised in shouts and oaths and doggerel songs, in which the Premier's name resounded frequently. In two days the new Parliament was to be opened, and Leichardt's Town was rife with political agitation.

Without, in the street there was the roar of traffic; the cabs and jingles were flying to and fro, and the lights

twinkled in the shop-windows, while the news-boys cried a late edition of the *Leichardt's Town Chronicle*, in which was the English intelligence.

Barrington bought a paper, and read a detailed account of the accident to the Scotch express.

It was as though he had been in a dream. He drank deep draughts of champagne, and every now and then would give himself a shake as if to convince himself that the tidings he had received were real.

The hours passed slowly, and the craving for Honoria's companionship became intense; it was more passionate than mere lover's longing to see and speak to the object beloved.

At last he took up his hat and went forth, shunning the thoroughfare, but passing through lonely streets, and loitering in an unfrequented quarter by the river till the hour for his love-meeting drew near.

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### IN PERIL.

BARRINGTON was in the Gardens by ten. The night was clear and moonlit, a trifle chill, as evenings in June are apt to be. He lit a cigar and strolled up and down beneath the bunya-trees, cursing below his breath Honoria's laggard steps, and watching the lights in the Premier's house which flickered in several windows, and at last became stationary only in those of Mr. Longleat's study.

He knew then that all but the master himself had retired. Surely she was free now. Would she never come?

He threw away the butt-end of his cigar as the clock in

the Parliamentary Buildings struck the half-hour after eleven. Then he saw Honoria, her tall figure enveloped in a long dark cloak which did not conceal the graceful sweep of her shoulders, emerge cautiously, and in apparent uncertainty, from one of the venetianed windows, and steal round by the shrubbery, passing at length through the wicket-gate into the public-grounds.

He saw in the first glimpse of her face that she had undergone some agitating experience. It was very pale, and her dark eyes looked bright and feverish, while her lips seemed to tremble with sensibility. She uttered a deep sigh. The night was very still. Above their heads, the bamboos rustled ever so slightly: they might have heard a leaf fall.

‘I thought that you were never coming,’ whispered Barrington. ‘Sweetest, what detained you? Did you know that I was here, waiting and counting the minutes till you appeared?’

‘Yes, I knew that you were here. There was a gentleman dining with us, and I could not get away sooner. . . . Listen!’ she went on, in a hurried discomposed manner, ‘I do not feel like myself to-night. I have something to tell you. No, do not speak; let me have my say first. I think that we had better part—for a time at least—if not for always. I am so miserable. I feel so ill—so restless. It has come over me strongly that I am wrong to be with you here—that you make me wicked. I want to go back to my old life. I am under a spell. If we were parted, I could decide calmly whether I love you or not. I cannot do so now. . . . I have had a heavy dread upon me for days. As I was stepping out, a voice seemed to whisper to me, “Stay!” All through dinner I seemed in a dream. I felt that something terrible was going to happen. Do you believe in spirits? Ever since Angela’s death, I have fancied that she was in the air close to me, like a chill

current freezing my blood when I thought of you. . . . And then I have imagined, and have heard other things. Hardress ! she exclaimed sharply, drawing herself away from him, 'did you—did you make Angela love you too ?'

Barrington shrank as Honoria spoke. Since he heard that Angela was dead, he had tried deliberately to thrust the remembrance of her from his mind. After a moment's pause, he replied :

'My dearest, what has put that notion into your head ?'

'An anonymous letter was sent me yesterday. I threw it in the fire, but its words rankled in my mind. At first I thought that I would not tell you—and then— You know that I *must* trust you. Is it true ?'

'Honoria !' said Barrington, in a constrained tone ; 'even if I had never known *you*, I could not have connected the idea of love as between man and woman with that pure poetic child. The feeling I had for Angela—and it was deep in its way—was that tender affection which one so innocent and imaginative might well inspire. She was like a forest flower which blooms and fades, and which one could not pass without a delicate pleasure in its beauty and perfume. I have mourned for her. Do not sully her memory by such thoughts as these.'

'Forgive me !' murmured Honoria. 'I have been sorry too,' she added. 'I have reproached myself because I did not understand her. It is thinking of her—of her father's grief—Aunt Pen says that he is as a man gone mad : he will not speak, but sits all day long by her grave—which has turned my heart towards *my* father—away from you. Forgive me if I wronged you. I *wished* to think evil of you. I wanted to have a reason for hating you.'

'What has your father been saying to you ?' asked Barrington. 'Why have you changed ?'

'He has said nothing,' answered Honoria. 'For weeks

we have been estranged ; we have never mentioned your name. But to-night there was something odd and sad in his manner. He kept eyeing me with a kind of wistful tenderness ; and my heart yearned to him. It was as though our souls were trying to speak, and could not. Only when he bade me good-night he said, "Honie, don't let anything come between us." And I could have fallen upon his neck, and told him that I was bad, and that I hated myself, and begged him to keep me beside him and not let me go out to-night. And then I would have implored him to take me away to some strange place, where we might forget, and learn to love each other. I felt that I had seemed proud and indifferent. Men are not like women. I ought not to have judged him. Perhaps if I had not been cold he would not have gone away to that other woman. But I could not speak, and it was too late. Oh, Hardress, release me ; give me time. Hardress, let me go ; don't make me come out any more like this. I cannot—I cannot !

It was a new Honoria who gasped out the broken sentences, clinging to him with hot, nervous fingers, that when they touched his neck thrilled him with passionate excitement. As she made her wild appeal she gazed at him with wide-open eyes, half-terrified, half-imploring, and wound her head back as though she were struggling against the spell which bound her.

'Why do you fight so hard against what is your fate ?' he said, in a tone at once imploring and caressing. 'You came out to-night because you love me. Is love so terrible a crime ? Is it not a joy rather than a torment ? Your scruples, dearest one, are natural to a daughter, but, believe me, they are unreasonable ; and knowing your heart as I do, how could I yield to them ?'

'You *will* misunderstand me,' exclaimed Honoria. 'It

is not only for my father's sake that I wish to be free, but because I distrust my own feelings. I want to go away, to Sydney, Tasmania—anywhere so that you do not follow me, and so that I can think calmly. . . . This thought was in my mind to-night, and many others; and when my father looked at me so, I had almost determined to tell him everything, to implore him to take me away. . . . And then a clerk from the Treasury came to see him, and they both went into his study. . . . I waited and waited, and all the time I knew that you were outside, and my heart was beating, and I felt sick and faint. I wanted to stay indoors, and yet something stronger than myself seemed to draw me to you. . . . And I grew frightened. At last I could not bear it. I put on my cloak, and said to myself that I would tell you everything, and implore you to release me. I will marry you by-and-by, perhaps, but not now—not for a long time. . . . And I think that I am going mad. I do not sleep at night; and everywhere I see your eyes, like those of a fiend, haunting me. I do not know whether I love or hate or dread you most. . . . Oh! don't look at me like that. Don't, don't! you frighten me. Let me go.'

He unloosed his arms and stood silently facing her. There was an evil expression in his eyes, from which, without knowing the cause, she instinctively shrank.

'I tell you that I am afraid of you,' she said; 'I want to go back. There is something strange about you to-night. Oh, I wish that I had stayed at home!'

'Honorina,' said Barrington, gravely, 'do you wish to take back your promise? Do you mean to throw me over?'

'No, no; I only ask you to be generous. You have made me your slave; I do not know how—but I am afraid of you. Give me back my liberty. If I love you, let me love of my free-will. Go away from me. At least go back to Dyraaba.'

‘You can have little faith in my love,’ said Barrington, ‘if you think that I can give you up so calmly. You have led me too far, and now I cannot let you draw back. I will have you for my own, not in an indefinite future, but now. I am going away indeed, but not to Dyraaba. I shall never go back to Dyraaba again. I have had news from home to-day, and I am half miserable and half joyful. I am a wretch for feeling so. All my people are in great grief. My brother and his two sons are dead. I am a rich man. My mother writes beseeching me to return at once. I want to read you what she says. I want to show you the lawyer’s letter; you will then see that there is no choice left us. It is necessary that I should leave Leichardt’s Land—that you should become mine at once. Your father’s consent is nothing. What sane man could consider his objection to me reasonable? You must come to England with me.’

‘Your brother dead,’ said Honoria, vaguely. ‘You are going to England.’

She was silent for a moment, looking at him as though she barely followed the drift of his words; yet comprehending that their relations towards each other had changed.

‘Hush!’ she whispered, suddenly clutching his arm. ‘Do you not hear a noise? There is a man listening behind the bamboos. I am certain of it; I heard a footstep. Oh, let us go away from here!’

And indeed there was a sound of retreating feet crushing the dry bamboo-leaves that strewed the ground.

‘My love,’ said Barrington, ‘this is the most retired part of the Gardens, but we cannot guard against intrusion. It would be fatal if you were recognised; and you are unveiled.’

Honoria trembled violently, nevertheless spoke with some of her old imperious air.

‘It is not because I am ashamed,’ she said, ‘but that I am



afraid—and afraid of what? I don't know—of you. Go on. I don't understand what you were saying. Tell me again. Your brother is dead, and you are going away. What do you wish me to do?

'How can I talk to you here?' asked Barrington. 'Would you have our confidences reported all over Leichardt's Town to-morrow? You must come with me to my rooms. I have lodgings in a quiet part of Leichardt's Town. You will go and return unperceived; and there we can speak of our future. We can decide our plans without fear of being seen or overheard. Everything is changed with me. You must read Burnley's letter. You must hear what my mother says to me. You see that it is a most important matter. Your future and mine depend upon your decision. Honoria, you must do as I bid you. When you have heard everything, you may weigh all the considerations calmly, but you owe me obedience now.'

'Go with you to your rooms? I could not. What would people think or say? No, no. Can you not write to me? Oh, I am certain that I heard footsteps again. Let me go back. I shall be able to think to-morrow. To-night I am frightened, unnerved.'

'To-morrow will be too late,' said Barrington. 'Come! I only ask you for an hour. I will bring you back to this spot. It is not like you to be deterred from doing what is desirable—nay, necessary—by a mere conventional scruple. There would be no impropriety in your going to my lodgings if Mrs. Ferris were with you. Can you not trust me to take care of you?'

'Yes, but I am alone. How can I go with you to a strange place? at this hour—it is impossible!'

'You did not hesitate to meet me here,' he urged, 'why should you object to spending an hour with me in my temporary home, where you will be as safe as in your own?'

Honoria, you are above these petty considerations. There is a cab waiting at the south gate. I tell you that I *must* speak to you alone. Do you not see that this news has changed my whole life—that you must decide at once whether you will be my wife or not?’

He drew her on for a few steps, while she weakly resisted his entreaties.

His longing impelled him almost beyond the bounds of self-control. He was conscious only of the overmastering desire to have her to himself. Those soft shadows which the moon threw upon her cheek and brow mocked and bewitched his excited fancy. . . . And she, too, seemed borne along upon the tide of his passion.

‘I am obliged to do what you bid me,’ said Honoria, submissively. ‘You are my master, and I cannot resist—I *must* obey you. I know that my better nature shrinks from you, and yet I cling to you. Hardress, why should I not trust you—why should I fear you?’

The appeal in her tone stifled for a moment the vague impulses in Barrington’s breast, which had as yet hardly shaped themselves into a definite design.

• ‘Come!’ he said; ‘have I not said that I have ever been loyal to the women who trusted me?’

He folded her mantle more closely round her, playfully chided her for inattention to her disguise, and placed her hand upon his arm in a calm protecting manner, which, contrasted with his former excitement, gave her new confidence and soothed her agitation.

Thus they walked down beneath the bunya-trees to the south gate of the Gardens, where a closed carriage was awaiting them.

Honoria shrank back again with involuntary repugnance to the thought that she was the victim of a deliberate scheme of coercion.

‘You had planned that I should come,’ she exclaimed.

‘A lover who would win his cause must be prepared at all points,’ said Barrington, lightly. ‘I trusted in your good sense and in my persuasions to overcome your scruples. I knew that our conversation was too important to bear the risk of interruption. The nights are very cold, dearest; and I have some regard for your health and comfort.’

She allowed him to help her into the carriage, and shivered as she cowered into the farthest corner. Barrington gave an order to the driver, and they were whirled along past King Street, with its many lights and buzz of traffic, into a darker region, where the carriage paused before one of a row of houses facing the river.

Barrington descended, spoke to the coachman, then with a latch-key opened the door to admit Honoria, who hurriedly alighted, and, fancying that she perceived two dark figures standing in the shadow of a neighbouring building, clung to Hardress for protection and concealment.

She found herself in a dim passage, lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling, and with closed doors upon one side. Once within, she breathed more freely. Barrington led Honoria upstairs into a sitting-room comfortably furnished, and with a bright fire burning upon the hearth.

‘You see that you are perfectly safe and infinitely warmer here than beneath the bamboos,’ he said lightly. ‘My landlady is sleeping the slumber of the just below stairs, and you will depart as quietly as you have entered. Let me draw your chair closer to the fire, and relieve you of your cloak. Your fingers are numbed with cold.’

His air of commonplace solicitude, the warmth and absence of melodramatic effect in his language or in their surroundings, dispelled Honoria’s vague fears, and made her almost ashamed of her former weakness. There was, too, a certain piquancy in the situation which appealed to her love

of adventure, and she looked about her with interest and animation.

'Forgive the disorder of my bachelor apartments,' said Barrington, removing a pipe from the table at her elbow. 'That is a view of Castle Barrington, and this is a likeness of my mother,' he added, seeing that her eyes wandered towards the photographs upon the mantelshelf.

Honorina examined the portrait attentively.

'How beautiful she is! how noble! . . . Your mother—and I—oh, if I could have had such a mother as this! Hardress, it is best indeed that we should part. Your people are not as my people, and my life has not fitted me for yours.'

He was silent. At that moment he dared not reply.

She gazed thoughtfully into the fire, her face bent forward, her hand supporting her chin. He stood opposite, watching her. Presently she turned and met his eyes.

'You look strange—troubled. It is thoughtless of me to forget that you have had bad news to-day. You are sorry for your brother's death. You said that you had a great deal to tell me. Say it now. I am not as nervous as I was. I will try to think calmly, and then I will decide. Tell me all that has happened—what you wish me to do.'

With forced composure Barrington began his tale, and related at length the tidings he had received that afternoon. He did not affect any great grief at the death of his brother, between whom and himself there had never been much sympathy; but the tone of genuine regret in which he spoke of his nephews and of his widowed sister-in-law touched Honorina's feelings, and convinced her of his sincerity. He talked of his mother and of her longing for his return; he read her the lawyer's letter, and a part of that from Lady Alice Barrington. Then his voice faltered, and in eager tones he painted the life they would lead in England, Italy

—wherever it should please her to dwell. He poured forth assurances of his unfailing love, and vague protestations, the drift of which she did not at once comprehend. . . . He passionately besought her to leave Leichardt's Land with him upon the morrow.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### SAVED.

#### HALF-PAST ONE.

As the bell in the Parliamentary Buildings boomed the single stroke, a shrill sharp cry echoed through the deserted thoroughfare in which Barrington's rooms were situated. The policeman watching at the corner of King Street had been attracted from his post by a row in a neighbouring public-house; and the street being quiet and eminently respectable, was not a likely resort for night loiterers. Thus, either the sound was not heard, or none cared to inquire into its origin.

Presently the door of Barrington's house was hurriedly opened, and Honoria Longleat herself, bareheaded, uncloaked, with wide-open terrified eyes and panic-stricken features, rushed forth into the street, and gazed helplessly around, not knowing where to turn for protection against some terrible and hitherto unimagined peril.

Before her at the distance of several hundred yards lay the river, with the long shadows and dimly-reflected lights upon its glassy surface, its banks bordered by low sheds that promised no effectual security. Honoria fled across the road, and cowered for a minute under the roof of one of these, unaware that Barrington, who had followed her from the house, was close beside her.

He approached, holding out his hand with a gesture of remonstrance. She uttered a faint cry, and flung herself away from him.

'Let me go home! Do not speak to me! How dare you come near me!'

'Honoriam!' he said, 'for God's sake command yourself! Put on your cloak and be silent. I entreat you have some regard for your reputation. You are labouring under an extraordinary delusion. You have misunderstood my proposal. You need not fear me. Come back, and listen to me calmly, or at least let me take you home.'

'Don't come near me!' she said again in a fierce whisper. 'I am not wholly your slave. I can defy you! You spoke too plainly for me to misunderstand your meaning. Every word that you utter is an insult. Stop that cab, and let me get into it.'

A hansom was being driven unsteadily along the road. Barrington stepped forward and hailed it. He placed Honoriam's cloak, which he had carried, upon her shoulders. She wrapped it round her, covering her head and half concealing her face, which was rigid with scorn, horror, and wrath.

Disdaining his arm, she got into the cab without a word. Barrington bade the man drive to the south gate of the Gardens, and was about to enter after her, but she leaned forward and said in that low unnatural voice, of which every word seemed to stab him like a knife:

'You shall not come with me. I will never see or speak to you again. I think that I could kill you at this moment for what you have dared to say to me. All my love is hate. Go!'

'Honoriam,' said Barrington, 'I repeat that you have misunderstood me. This is not a time to enter into explanations. I implore you, for your own sake, be silent now. If

you are recognised you are lost. I am bound to protect you against yourself. I *must* take you to the Gardens. I will neither look at you nor speak to you, since my presence is so distasteful, but go with you I will.'

Too weak to struggle further, she allowed him to place himself beside her, and each drew apart from the other: she with her profile turned away from him, shuddering irrepressibly; and he, all his passion sobered, cursing himself for his madness, not daring to address her.

The driver, who was in a state of semi-intoxication, had not thoroughly comprehended his orders, and instead of taking a straight course on by the river, turned up King Street, and drove at a break-neck pace through the lighted crowded thoroughfare, where, as the cab swayed unsteadily from side to side, the danger of a collision seemed imminent.

'Slower,' shouted Barrington. 'You are going wrong. Drive down Charles Street, and along to the Emu Point Ferry. There will be an accident if you are not careful.'

But the adjuration proved of no avail. The cabman gave a drunken nod, and did not abate his reckless pace. Fearful of attracting observation to his companion, Barrington drew back into the cab, and submitted to the inevitable. They turned abruptly into another street, and taking the wrong side of the road, came into violent contact with a vehicle going in another direction. There was a confused sound of ejaculations and oaths, of grating wheels and plunging horses.

Barrington's hansom received most injury; it overturned; the driver was hurled on to the footpath, and the other two occupants flung together into the street.

Honorina had fallen upon her companion. The shock was great, and, though actually unhurt, she lay for a moment dizzy and half-unconscious. Then a hand grasped her arm

and helped her to rise, and a voice she knew, uttered in low dismayed tones :

‘Honoriam!’

She tottered to her feet. Dyson Maddox and Corny Cathcart stood facing her. Both looked amazed—horror-stricken. There was no possibility of concealing her identity had she had presence of mind to attempt doing so. Her cloak had dropped from her head, and the light of a neighbouring lamp shone full upon her face, still wearing that indefinable expression of terror which had fallen upon it when she fled from the place where she had had her interview with Barrington.

In her bewilderment she had almost forgotten what had happened to her, and hardly realised the shame of her position, or the fact that Dyson and Cathcart had jumped from the cab with which her own had come into collision. Then her eyes fell upon Barrington’s prostrate figure as he lay stunned beside her. The horror and loathing returned with fresh force. She darted towards Dyson and clutched his hand.

‘Take me away!’ she cried. ‘Save me! Take me away!’

A little crowd had begun to assemble round the scene of the accident. Honoriam had recovered sufficient self-possession to shroud herself anew in her cloak.

‘Oh, don’t let these people see me!’ she whispered imploringly, clinging to Dyson as though he had been an angelic protector.

He led her on almost roughly, away from the light and clear of the throng, and stopping a cab which was driving slowly up, placed her in it.

She covered her face, and with a deep quivering sigh drew back as well as she could into the obscurity of the carriage. Dyson bade the driver wait, and returned to the



spot where Cathcart and one of the bystanders were lifting Barrington from the ground. The latter had struck his head against the wheel, and blood flowed from a gash upon his forehead; his eyes were closed, and he was still unconscious.

‘Corny,’ said Dyson, aside, to his manager, ‘I am going to take her home; whatever happens I can trust you to shield her name. God knows what it all means! You had better take that villain to an hotel, and send for a doctor.’

He returned to Honoria.

‘I will take you home,’ he said gently. ‘Do not be frightened! You are safe with me.’

‘No one must see me,’ she cried wildly. ‘I cannot—I cannot bear it. Tell him to drive to the south entrance of the Gardens, and you will take me to the little gate. That was how I came out. Then I shall be safe.’

Dyson gave the necessary directions, and they were driven through quiet streets, past the Emu Point Ferry, till they reached the large iron gates, a little way below the Premier’s house.

He then dismissed the cab and offered Honoria his arm. She was shaking with suppressed sobs that were in danger of becoming hysterical. When they were in the Gardens and had reached the shelter of the bamboos, she fairly gave way, and, leaning against a tree, covered her face and wept bitterly.

Dyson stood by, listening in deep distress to the incoherent words which broke from her lips, and which seemed to tell of insult and disgrace. All his manhood stirred in furious wrath against Barrington, who had dared to place her in a position so compromising. That she had been imprudent—that she had laid herself open to insult he feared; but his faith in her never wavered.

'Honoriam,' he said, in tones of the deepest tenderness, 'oh, don't cry so. I cannot bear to hear your sobs. No one, nothing shall hurt you now. I am your brother; remember that, dear. You are safe with me. Tell me what you please. Trust me unreservedly. I want nothing in the world except to serve you, to comfort you, to avenge you. Oh, my darling, don't cry! Be brave and speak, and tell me the truth.'

Honoriam caught his hand and looked into his face with eyes as searching and faithful as those of a dog. Her need was so great that all other scruples fell before it.

'I don't want to be avenged,' she said very low. 'I only want to sink into the earth so that my face shall be never seen any more. I have been—insulted. I—I would speak, but it shames me—only it is right that you should know. He thought I was a wicked woman—he—said—— Oh, I would die rather than that my father should know . . .'

'Great God!' said Dyson. 'Don't torture me, Honoriam. . . . I can believe no evil of you—and yet your words, your looks, convey horrible suspicions. Oh, tell me everything. Speak to me as though I were your mother—your brother.'

A shudder passed through Honoriam's frame, but her words had failed her. She stared beyond him, as it were, with her great wild eyes, still clinging convulsively to his hand.

'Honoriam!' said Dyson. 'I implore you to tell me. There's no one can help you as I can. Speak—never mind; don't be afraid, Honoriam.'

'I will tell you,' she said, almost in a whisper. 'I have no one—no one but you. . . . I will try to trust you . . . . it seems as if I could have no more faith in anyone—as if all the world must be bad. . . . I did not know that there were things so terrible. I did not think that wrong could ever come near me. . . . I was angry when you said, long ago, that I played with fire. . . . And then a veil

seemed taken off my soul, and I saw myself—I, who had been so proud—and I saw that he was infamous. . . . *That* was what I believed to be love. I did not know why I shrank—I struggled, and then I yielded; I wished to be true. . . . And all the time he had wicked thoughts. He would have married me for my money . . . but now his brother is dead and he is rich, money is nothing to him. And to-night the mask fell; it was like a hideous revelation—of him, of myself. He said that circumstances were changed with him—that it would break his mother's heart if he married me. . . . He said that I must go away with him and begin a new life. At first I did not understand—and then I knew. . . . He said I should be his wife before God. . . . I . . . oh, now you know. . . . And while he spoke I became cold, and the horror grew upon me, and I ran from the room, away—I did not care where. . . . But he would go with me in the cab—and then the accident happened, and you came . . . .'

She paused for a moment, her bosom heaving; and Dyson said nothing, only hanging in breathless anxiety upon her broken words.

'It was as though I had awakened from a dream—awakened to find myself upon the brink of a precipice. From the first he made me do things that I did not wish. I thought that he was different to other people; I *was* playing with fire; I was bold and unmaidenly. I thought no harm could come to me. My life seemed so flat—and I wanted something new. I was craving after excitement of some sort. . . . But it was not that I was wicked altogether. I only knew dimly; I did not think of wrong. I trusted him to be loyal as you—as Australian men are loyal—it is the English who are false, who have bad thoughts. . . . I did not think that there was any more harm in meeting him in the Gardens at night, than in walking with him by the

lagoon at Kooralbyn. I was obliged to do what he wished ; he made me obey him. . . . I fancied that I loved him ; I was fascinated ; I had no will. It was the evil eye—it was infatuation. You cannot understand, for you do not believe in such things. . . . I came out here almost every evening when the rest were in bed. And to-night he made me go with him to his lodgings.'

Dyson uttered a hoarse exclamation of horror.

'Honor! you were mad.'

'He made me,' she said, with almost childlike simplicity. 'I did not want to go at first—I struggled—but he was stronger than I. His brother is dead ; he said that he must go to England. He said that he had important things to tell me. . . . And I went ; and then——'

She fell again into a fit of shuddering.

Dyson pressed her hand without speaking. After a few moments she went on, taking up her story brokenly, following the sequence of her thoughts.

'Often I have not known whether I was miserable or happy. It was like a dream in which there was a kind of wicked joy and then hatred and disgust. . . . If you had tried at first—if anyone had told me what it really meant—if I had known—I would have resisted—I would not have allowed him to master me ; but I thought that at last I was going to have feelings like the women in books—who lead tumultuous lives, who have great passions—with whom existence is not mere stagnation ; and I liked my blood to be stirred. I had no mother ; no one to warn me. And I revolted against my father—I despised him, and was bitter—I thought that there could be nothing in common between us—that he less than anyone could understand what was in my heart.'

'God help you, poor child!' uttered Dyson. And in the midst of his intense pity, of his anger and sorrow, a deep joy

took possession of his soul. The way in which she clung to him, her manner of looking and speaking, made him feel that she had set him apart from other men. Her weakness and broken confession seemed to bring her nearer to him.

He took her hand and led her along the dim road beneath the shadowy bamboos. They were joined and yet asunder. In his manner there was a chivalrous, silent sympathy, which encouraged her to speak on, with an imploring dependence in her tone.

'It seems so long ago,' she murmured; 'and I have changed, as it were, all in a moment. And yet if he were near me, I should be afraid. Oh!' she cried, 'you will keep him from me; you won't forsake me! Say that you will not let people think ill of me!'

'I wish for nothing except to serve you,' repeated Dyson again. 'You must never see or speak to him any more. . . . It has been a bitter ordeal for you, but you will pass through it, and you will be nobler and wiser. You may know real happiness. You may know the love which reverences its object.' He paused, fearful lest the tremor in his voice should betray him. 'You will forget all this,' he added. 'It is as you say, a bad dream. The morning light will drive it away. Our lives have some meaning deeper than the mere longing for passionate experience, and you will learn it in time.'

His words seemed to soothe and elevate her troubled soul. She grew calmer, and, as they walked hand-in-hand, a feeling of peace and security crept over her, as though, after passing through stormy waters, she had reached a haven.

They paused at the little gate.

'I came out this way,' she said. 'You must not come further. Do not ever speak of this again. Do not remind

me, by look or word, that I have been humiliated so. I cannot bear it. I must bury it, all the thought of it, in my own heart, and never lay it bare, except when I want to remind myself how good you have been to-night.' She glanced up at him with a sudden grateful look. 'And *he* is going away,' she went on; 'his brother is dead. He will not remain in Australia. That is the only comfort—that he will not stay; that he cannot make me remember always that I have been disgraced. . . . If I ever loved him, I will fight against my love; I will think only of the horror and the loathing; I will pray to be delivered from the infatuation. . . . I will try to be better in all ways. . . . You will not say,' she went on in a questioning undertone, 'that I ought to tell my father? I could not do it. I could not bear that he should know.'

'No, no,' said Dyson; 'what end would the telling him serve? Try and think of this humiliation as a trial which was needed to make you strong.'

She looked at him as she stood with her hand upon the gate, and the tears gathered in her eyes.

'You do not altogether despise me?'

'Oh, do not ask that,' exclaimed Dyson, impetuously, 'when my life is yours; when you know that I have no impulse but to honour you.' He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it with chivalrous respect. 'Remember,' he said, 'that I am your brother. You may trust me unreservedly. You must go home,' he added. 'Do not linger. I will watch here till you are safe within. God keep you, my dear!'

She obeyed him without further word. Her tall, dark figure disappeared for a minute among the trees, then became distinct again upon the veranda, and finally passed in through the French window of her bedroom.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## SINISTER OMENS.

UPON the morning after Honoria's midnight adventure, the Premier received the following letter :

' Adams's Hotel,  
' South Leichardt's Town.

' MY FRIEND,

' It is surely impossible that you could have been aware, yesterday, that my husband was on his way down from the north. This afternoon I returned home suspecting nothing, and found him with a letter you had sent me in his hand. Were you mad to write what has compromised me so utterly? Yet I am almost glad that the farce has ended, and that now I may fling off my legalised degradation and face the world defiantly. To-night I have left my husband's house for ever. I have told no one where I have gone. I wish for a little while, at least, to be at peace. I have private rooms in this quiet inn where the landlady was formerly a servant of my father's, so that I am not likely to be annoyed by impertinent observation.

' Do not come to me to-morrow or the next day. On the third day I will see you.

' Adieu,

' C. V.'

Longleat eagerly read the letter, to receive which was indeed a relief, after the tortures of anxiety he had been enduring, then passionately pressed the flimsy paper to his lips. He had passed a wakeful night, spent in alternately pacing the floor of his study, in vain efforts at composition and in

brooding over the wood fire, which, as he bent forward now cast fitful gleams upon his massive face, haggard with watching and suspense.

He had exercised sufficient self-control to refrain from crossing the water and reconnoitring the cottage at Emu Point ; but imagination picturing Mrs. Vallancy the victim to her husband's jealous fury, goaded his longing and compassion into a fierce rage difficult to support in this state of forced inaction.

It is impossible to credit Longleat with the possession of many moral and religious scruples, nevertheless his hidden sin had haunted him for months like a condemning spirit. At first his compunction had chiefly arisen from a sense of contamination in the connection between Mrs. Vallancy and his daughter ; but as gradually his passion gained the mastery over his purer instincts, his consciousness of wrong intent lessened, and his love for Honoria became slowly numbed by the misconception between them, and the influence of his miserable infatuation. Now that the crisis had arrived, there rose in his mind a fierce exultation in the tearing away of secrecy and restraint, while more strongly than ever the feeling of personal predominance and revolt against the established order of things, made him glory in defying the dictates of society.

He was not troubled by qualms as to Vallancy's proceedings. The latter was a cur and a bully, and deserved neither fear nor consideration. The abstract equity of the question did not weigh with him. A prize which one man misuses, another has clearly a right to appropriate, providing the final intention be righteous ; and in the moral justice of his determination to marry Mrs. Vallancy, Longleat had the fullest confidence.

The messenger who had brought the letter had received orders to wait. Longleat dashed off an incoherent reply,



promising to respect Connie's wish for solitude, for that day at least; but imploring permission to call at Adams's after the opening of the House on the morrow.

As he was folding up the letter a thought struck him, and he hastily filled in a cheque for a hundred pounds, enclosed it, and sealed the envelope with his signet-ring.

Upon that morning Parliament was to assemble, preliminary to the formal opening upon the morrow for the choice of the Speaker, and afterwards the Premier had a political engagement at Kooya which would detain him till late that evening. When his letter to Mrs. Vallancy was despatched, he washed, shaved, and changed his clothes, presenting, when he emerged from his dressing-room, more of his old, prosperous, self-assertive look than he had worn for weeks. The consciousness of power was strong within him that day; suspense was lulled; and he felt confident that political triumph would smile upon him on the morrow.

He breakfasted alone, making an inquiry from the servant after his daughter, who was reported to be still sleeping; he then hurried off to keep an appointment with one of his colleagues.

All the morning Honoria lay in a darkened room, crushed so low with humiliation that it seemed impossible for her ever again to face the light of day. Her agony was all the keener because, in spite of her outraged pride and fierce indignation, she could not repress an intense longing to know whether Barrington had suffered any injury from the accident which had befallen them the night before.

She got up and dressed at last, but would not quit her chamber, and gave orders that she was to be denied to any visitors who might ask for her.

When, about mid-day, Maddox called at The Bunyas, he was told that Miss Longleat could see no one.

During the day she was tormented by a restless dread

that Barrington would seek her presence. The fear was groundless; he did not come. Then terror gave place to vague disappointment, and disappointment to alarm.

A terrible dreariness crept over her. She longed for the sight of Aunt Penelope's placid countenance, and the sound of her gurgling platitudes. Even Mr. Ferris's society would not at that moment have been unwelcome. Oh to take up the old turbid current of her existence, when, if boredom was unpleasant, it meant at least safety! She had been launched upon an unknown sea, and her own surging desires and impetuous impulses were the waves in which she had been engulfed.

She covered her face with her hands.

'Oh, Dyson, Dyson!' she murmured, 'I wish we were together again quietly at Kooralbyn. I think we could be happy now, if *he* would let me be; but it is too late, and I cannot—I don't know what to do. Oh, I don't know what to do!'

Suddenly she remembered what 'mid her inward excitement had been quite forgotten—that upon the morrow the new Parliament of Leichardt's Land would be opened, and the Premier's triumph or defeat assured.

'I cannot be there!' she exclaimed, with passionate horror. 'Oh, I cannot—I cannot!'

There seemed that afternoon an unnatural stillness in the atmosphere which surrounded The Bunyas. No visitor rang at the door-bell, or entered by the garden-gate, as was the custom of intimate friends. The distant sounds which floated down from the Parliamentary Buildings, telling of preparations for the ceremony of the morrow, seemed to Honoria's excited imagination like presages of doom.

Nor was she alone in her forebodings. Though the appointment of the Speaker had gone in favour of the Government, even with the outside world auguries of evil

were rife. The Leader of the Opposition had spent part of the morning in earnest conclave with the chiefs of his party. There were in his manner signs of exultation which could not be mistaken. Mysterious telegrams had been sent to Western Australia, and still more mysterious replies received. Early in the day a despatch in cipher had been wired by the ex-Attorney-General to a certain lawyer in England.

In the afternoon Middleton and Vallancy were seen walking arm-in-arm down King Street. It was whispered that Mrs. Vallancy had fled from her husband's roof, and that a terrible revelation of former misdeeds was hanging over the head of the Premier.

But of all those most directly interested in the impending disaster Dyson Maddox was perhaps least conscious of its imminence or of its real nature. His mind was completely occupied with thoughts of Honoria—of how he could best screen her from the results of her imprudence, and prevent the true facts of the case from transpiring. He went through his usual routine of work, and transacted his official business as though he had been in a dream. He was ostensibly occupied with the viceregal speech, but in reality exercising his brain upon the problem of Honoria's infatuation for Barrington, when Cornelius Cathcart entered the office.

'Have you seen or heard anything of Miss Longleat to-day?' he asked eagerly.

Dyson shook his head.

'I called at The Bunyas, but was told that Miss Longleat was not well enough to see anyone,' he replied.

'That blackguard is in a bad way,' continued Cathcart. 'The doctors say it is concussion of the brain. I hope he may never recover. Have you looked at the English papers yet? There is in the "Home News" an account of the death of Sir Lionel Barrington and of his two sons. This

fellow has succeeded to the baronetcy. Now all Leichardt's Town is ringing with the news, and with the story of the accident of last night, though as yet *her* name has not been mentioned in the affair. Good God, Dyson! it is a worse business than I thought. Do you know that they had been together at his lodgings—that she was driving away from there with him at two o'clock this morning?

Dyson's lips were grimly set; he nodded silently. After a pause he said:

'I know it. Last night, in her misery and shame at the insult which had been offered her, she told me everything. He had acquired an influence over her which to me seems incomprehensible; he persuaded her to meet him clandestinely in the Gardens; he decoyed her to his rooms under pretence of having something important to tell her. Cathcart, remember that she is motherless, and that there was no one to teach her the meaning of evil. And that d——d villain played upon her innocence. In his poverty he would have married her gladly, but in his prosperity he did not deem her worthy to be his wife. He dared to propose to her that she should accompany him to England. . . . God! I could have killed him. . . . She is pure as an angel. Her anguish, her outraged pride were terrible to witness. Do not allude to this again. I could have spoken to no one but you—not to you if you had not been with me last night. You know what she was to me—what I must feel. I wonder that I have kept my hands from *his* throat.'

'You will avoid making a scandal,' said Cathcart; 'that would be fatal. The only safety for her is in hushing the matter up. Yet,' he added, 'sooner or later the affair will be known; these things always leak out. It is more than likely that some one recognised her, and there are many evil tongues in Leichardt's Town. Think if anyone but ourselves had been in that cab! I am not sure that it would

not be wisest to go straight to the Premier, and make a clean breast of the whole thing. He is powerful enough to protect his daughter.'

'No,' said Dyson, firmly. 'She wishes that her father should be kept in ignorance. Can you not understand how she would shrink from any disclosure to him? At any cost the affair must be hushed, denied, disproved. To-morrow she must show herself at the Opening as though nothing had happened; and after this week it would be well that she should go away for a time, to Melbourne or Tasmania. I have thought the matter out. This is the only course. You and I, Corny, must protect her.'

Cathcart wriggled out of his chair, and made a furious onslaught upon the fire.

'I cannot stand it,' he said presently. 'I shall start for Barramunda the first thing to-morrow. I have been skulking about King Street all the morning, expecting at each corner to hear her name spoken. There is something in the air. I see men nudging each other and whispering mysteriously in the hotel verandas. I am told that there is a plot brewing amongst the Oppositionists—a charge to be brought against the Premier when the House meets.'

Dyson smiled disdainfully.

'They will try to make capital out of Vallancy's appointment to Gundaroo. We have run the gauntlet of that already. If ever there were a man certain of success, it is Longleat; but my brain is in a whirl to-day—I cannot think of political matters. I have to see Little at three; it is that time now.'

'You will be at the dinner to-night?' said Cathcart.

'Yes; we must both be there, ready to give the lie if Honoria is mentioned in connection with last night's occurrence.'

'There is a rumour afloat that Mrs. Vallancy has run away with the Premier.'

'Pshaw!' replied Dyson. 'At this moment Longleat is addressing a meeting of navvies at Kooya.'

'You don't believe in that scandal, then?'

'It is too obvious to be doubted,' replied Dyson, shortly. 'That is Little's knock. I will say good-bye for the present. We shall meet this evening.'

Cathcart withdrew, and the Attorney-General entered.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE DINNER TO GENERAL COMPTON.

THE dinner which the Governor had mentioned to Mr. Longleat, and which was given to General Compton, a certain military officer who had come out from England upon a tour of inspection of the Australian defences, took place that evening.

It was an entirely informal banquet. The hosts were half a dozen of the 'best' men in Leichardt's Land, who had in their youth been acquainted with General Compton, and wished to do him honour before his departure from Australia. These gentlemen might have been pointed out as representing an especial type of colonist. They were cadets of noble families, who having emigrated early in life, combined the hereditary instincts of race with the practical wisdom of the colonial squatter, and embodied the truest Conservatism to be found in Australia.

The position which they held was neutral, and entirely independent of monetary or political prestige. They rather disdained the strife of parties, and had they entered the arena would probably have withdrawn from it, disgusted by the petty contention of conflicting personal interests; yet

their influence, though passive, was powerful, and it may be said went far towards preserving the balance of power in an undisciplined community.

The dinner had been carefully composed, and was well served in the principal dining-room of the club. Colonel Augmering, in a strictly social capacity, presided. He was delighted to escape from the shackles of viceregal etiquette, and by no means regretted that the Premier's absence precluded the introduction of any political element into the convivial gathering. The company was entirely to his taste, and Lady Georgina's eagle eye did not rule the repast.

General Compton was placed upon the Governor's right. He was erect and distinguished-looking, with fine eyes, regular features, and a high-bred utterance. He had divided with Barrington the honours of the season ; had not been remiss in his attentions to Miss Longleat ; and though report proclaimed him a married man, he contrived to keep his wife in the background and to retain the prestige of a bachelor. He was a *bon vivant*, a good story-teller, an admirer of the fair sex ; and when, as upon occasions like the present, he was enabled to relax the rigid conventionality necessary to the maintenance of his military dignity, he displayed a tendency to *double entendre*.

The other guests, with one or two exceptions, notably in the cases of Dyson Maddox and Cornelius Cathcart, were men of European proclivities, bearing the stamp of cities curiously blended with the rude traces of bush life. The only discordant element in the party presented itself in the shape of Mr. Vallancy, who, in virtue of a quasi-cousinship, had been invited at the last moment out of compliment to General Compton, and who was manifestly unwelcome to several of the gentlemen present.

He had come, fancying that Longleat might be there, with the vaguely-formed intention of making a scene. He

looked excited and unsteady. His face was pale and his eyes wild, while his mood seemed to alternate between fits of forced hilarity and sullen depression.

At his entrance an uneasy consciousness fell upon the group. No one dared to question him upon his abrupt return from Gundaroo. The names of the Premier and Mrs. Vallancy, upon the lips of everyone present, were forcibly arrested there. There was an awkward silence, but the General's fine tact bridged over the gulf. Common-place topics were introduced, and as the dinner proceeded restraint wore off. Conversation flowed smoothly after a time, and jarring notes were drowned in the sound of mirth and repartee.

The champagne-glasses were frequently plied. Colonel Augmering's face reddened, and his mood became expansive. He forgot that he was the Governor of an important colony, and suffered his heart to rejoice in the recollection of past jovial experiences. General Compton's anecdotes began to touch upon women, in a manner more and more significant. When the attendants had left the room, the laughter had reached as high a pitch of uproariousness as is possible in refined male society.

There is a gentlemanly coarseness to be observed in post-prandial conversation, which in the ears of an abstemious listener is apt to sound obnoxiously. Dyson sat silent; his soul rising in a disgust which, under any other circumstances, he might not have felt, his tongue refusing to take part in the piquant discourse that flowed down each side of the table.

The tide of discussion turned towards the relative merits of English and Australian beauties. As was natural, Honoria Longleat's name was mentioned in terms of praise. General Compton was loud in his admiration. Such a figure, such eyes, such hair, must needs place their possessor upon a par with any European belle. Free comments were bestowed



upon her smile, her dress, her gait. Was not her physique of the same type as that of the celebrated Mrs. ——, whom Colonel Augmering must recollect? and so on. It was impossible to take open exception to the remarks, yet Dyson's anger rose to the pitch of fury. That his goddess should be profaned by such vulgar criticism! He made one or two attempts to turn the conversation, but to no avail. Presently Colonel Augmering exclaimed, as though apropos of the subject.

'What a thousand pities that Barrington could not be here this evening! Never was so sorry for a man in my life. Curious that he should have been knocked under, just after hearing of his good luck in having stepped into his brother's shoes. Seems unkind to say so, don't it? I used to know poor old Lionel Barrington, and liked him, though he was not one of your jovial sort; always a bit of a screw. Many is the capital day's sport I have had in his coverts. By Jove! what a fine woman his mother was! Do you remember her, Compton?'

'A splendid woman,' replied General Compton. 'I know her well. It was I who advised her to send Hardress out here—poor devil! But there was nothing else to be done after that affair in the Guards.'

'You know the truth of that story?' asked Maddox, suddenly.

'Of course. It was talked about in every club in London; but people will have forgotten it long before Hardress's return to England. At any rate, it is not fair to repeat it now. Men will be men, and women, women.'

'And *women, women,*' repeated Vallancy, with diabolical emphasis. 'You are right, General. It is they who drive men to the deuce.'

'The more fools men for being driven,' laughed the General.

‘Let us drink confusion to the sex,’ continued Vallancy. ‘This is uncommonly fine claret. I don’t know that I ever tasted better at Brockley—eh, General? Perdition to women!’

‘You would not persuade my friend Barrington to join you in that toast,’ laughed General Compton. ‘He was always a noted admirer of the fair sex; is still, I believe. I hope to congratulate him before long upon his conquest of the Australian beauty, and of her fortune.’

‘The Premier will have nothing to say to him,’ remarked one of the guests. ‘I know it for a fact. Our *ci-devant* bullock-driver has some queer republican notions, and among them is a hatred of the English aristocracy. But Miss Longleat is a young lady of spirit, and determined to marry whom she pleases. It is a case of genuine love. She and her father have not spoken since the affair came out.’

‘The Enchantress of Kooralbyn in love!’ cried another. ‘I thought that she was *la belle dame sans merci*.’

‘Sir,’ said Dyson slowly, addressing the Governor, his fury at white heat, ‘you will allow me to protest against this public mention of a lady’s name.’

‘Oh, my dear fellow!’ said the Governor, in a bantering tone, ‘we are all friends here, and all devoted and respectful admirers of the young lady—no one more so than myself. She is national property, and her matrimonial projects are as interesting to the colony as the formation of the Kooya Railway or her father’s possible knighthood. But since you are so punctilious, we will drop the subject and confine ourselves to talking about Mr. Barrington. I never was so shocked in my life as when I was told this morning of his accident. By the way, I am not at all clear about the affair. No one seems to know exactly how it happened. Has anyone heard how he was this evening?’

'I sent to inquire late this afternoon, your Excellency,' replied the aide-de-camp. 'They thought that Barrington was better—he was no longer insensible.'

'How did it take place?' asked a gentleman who had only arrived from the Bush that afternoon.

Barrington was driving down Silver Street in a hansom, about two o'clock this morning. The cabman was tipsy, and ran into something. There was a clean smash, and poor Barrington was knocked against the kerbstone.'

'I was talking to old Chittenden in the smoking-room this afternoon,' said a gentleman seated next Dyson. 'No one has a keener relish for a bit of gossip, as you and I know. He was full of a mysterious lady in black. He said that she was in the cab with Barrington when the accident happened, and was hustled off by some kind friend before anyone could catch a glimpse of her face.'

'I am afraid,' said the General, 'that my friend Hardress has not been as prudent as one might have hoped. It was surely unwise to trust himself, in the company of Incognita, to the tender mercies of a tipsy cabman. These escapades won't help him in making a good marriage. Not that that is of much consequence now. I am not certain that, under present circumstances, Lady Alice Barrington would welcome an Australian daughter-in-law.'

'And did no one see the lady?' asked the Governor, curiously.

'Clark, of the Lands, watched Barrington, and a tall woman in black, with fair hair, get out of a close carriage at River Terrace, where Barrington lodges, about midnight,' said the aide-de-camp, who knew his patron's weakness, and had come primed with the latest gossip. 'No doubt this was the same lady with whom he was driving later. Clark swears to the hair and the height, but she was holding her hand to her face, so that he could not see her features.'

‘By Jove!’ exclaimed Colonel Augmering, ‘I shall have a nice chaff against Barrington when he gets round. A mysterious female—tall, with golden hair. Can no one tell me the colour of her eyes?’

‘They are brown, your Excellency,’ said Vallancy, suddenly joining in the discussion, with the air of one well informed upon the subject.

‘What! you are acquainted with the fair Anonyma, Mr. Vallancy?’ said Colonel Augmering.

Cathcart and Dyson exchanged quick glances across the table.

‘In common justice,’ exclaimed the latter, with a ghastly attempt at unconcern, ‘I think the subject ought to be dropped, at least till Mr. Barrington is able to speak for himself. If there *was* a lady in the case, there are obvious reasons why her name should not be mentioned.’

‘My dear Maddox,’ said the Governor, jokingly, ‘you are most heroic in your championship this evening; but don’t you think that in this instance it is somewhat misplaced? An unveiled lady, who is seen driving with a gentleman at two o’clock in the morning, is surely public property.’

Dyson’s blood ran cold, but clearly there was no more to be said. To pursue his remonstrance would but make matters worse. The men had all drunk too much to be over-nice in their distinctions, and a point of honour is not easily discerned through the fumes of wine and cigar smoke.

The remark was followed by a coarse innuendo, greeted with a burst of ribald laughter.

Vallancy was assailed with eager, half-joking questions, which he parried, stimulating curiosity till the importunities redoubled. For a moment the gentlemanly instinct made him hesitate; then a cur-like longing for revenge against Longleat got the better of him. It was in his power to

damn the reputation of his enemy's daughter, as that enemy had damned that of his wife.

'You all know the lady,' he exclaimed, in loud, clear tones. 'I see no reason why she should disgrace herself, and get off scot-free——'

'For God's sake, think what you are saying, man!' whispered Cathcart convulsively in his ear.

'It was Honoria Longleat, the Premier's daughter,' said Vallancy, looking defiantly around, 'who was seen with Barrington at his lodgings last night, and who was driving with him when the accident happened in Silver Street.'

A sudden, alarming silence fell upon the party. Vallancy was half-terrified by the effect his words had produced, half-cowed by the indignant eyes that were turned upon him.

'I can prove the facts,' he asserted doggedly. 'I have witnesses who can swear to the truth of what I have said. There is not a man in Leichardt's Town able to give me the lie.'

'You are either mad or drunk!' said Dyson, rising like an indignant bear, with a little shake of his broad shoulders. His voice rang clear through the room. He was perfectly calm, and, as he stood erect under the light, looked rigid as iron; but there was a gleam in his eye which pierced into Vallancy's soul, and extinguished the small spark of courage by which it had been animated. 'If you are neither, then you are a cowardly liar! You have foully aspersed a lady whom you believed would be undefended, because her father is not present to protect her from insult. The introduction of her name into such an assemblage as this, was at best a breach of good taste. Had the Premier been here, it could not have been committed. I am glad that the calumny has been uttered in my hearing. I may at least guard from profanation a name which is dearer to me than my own honour.'

Colonel Augmering drew himself up in his chair, and said, with an air of stern dignity that contrasted strangely with his former joviality :

‘ Mr. Maddox, your severe words reflect somewhat on me as the person presiding at this table. I will not admit that the rebuke has been deserved. Most of us had reason to believe that we were in the company of *gentlemen*. I am shocked and grieved at the turn which a mere bantering conversation has taken. Mr. Vallancy must be labouring under an extraordinary delusion, and, after a moment’s reflection, will acknowledge his mistake. As far as we are concerned, this ridiculous accusation shall be as absolutely void as though it had never been uttered.’

‘ I will not retract what I know to be true,’ said Vallancy, doggedly. ‘ If Mr. Barrington were to swear on his oath that Miss Longleat did not go to his rooms with him at midnight last night, I could prove him guilty of perjury.’

‘ I repeat that Mr. Vallancy has lied,’ said Maddox, deliberately. ‘ I am ready to argue the point with him when and where he pleases. Gentlemen, I appeal to your chivalry to help me in vindicating a pure and innocent lady from slander. That lady is engaged to be my wife. Surely this is sufficient answer to Mr. Vallancy’s accusation.’

Several of the gentlemen cried, ‘ Shame not to have told us sooner ;’ some laughed ; some looked disconcerted, and others shouted ‘ Brava !’

‘ I congratulate you, Mr. Maddox,’ said the Governor. ‘ It would have spared some unpleasantness if you had made this announcement earlier in the evening. It is, as you say, disproof sufficient of Mr. Vallancy’s statement. But why this secrecy ?’

‘ The engagement has been lately arranged,’ replied Maddox, imperturbably. ‘ There were private reasons for not making it public ; now, for Miss Longleat’s sake, the

more widely it is known the better. And it must be understood that any disparaging allusion to my future wife is the deepest insult to me. I thank your Excellency for your good wishes.'

'My dear sir,' said the Governor, testily, 'there is no one here who would for a moment credit Mr. Vallancy's statement. The whole thing is a ridiculous misconception, and must not be allowed to go beyond these walls. Mr. Vallancy, you must see the absurdity of what you have said. Your eyes have deceived you; you should be careful in accepting their evidence too readily. I am thankful, at least, that your accusation was made in this company. As a personal favour, I beg that you will withdraw it without further question. Gentlemen, I put it to you as men of honour: this scandalous report must not pass our lips. I am sorry, General, that the hilarity of the evening should have been marred by this unfortunate mistake.'

'No,' said General Compton, courteously; 'one must regret the position of my poor friend Barrington. Mr. Maddox, I congratulate you heartily, though I cannot but deplore the fact that so fair a star must in future shine only upon Australian shores.'

'Mr. Vallancy has not yet withdrawn his statement,' said Cathcart, coolly.

Vallancy looked down the table. Every gaze was fixed upon him disapprovingly, while Dyson Maddox, as he stood erect, with flashing eyes and sinewy frame, looked no mean antagonist. The natural cowardice of the man triumphed.

'Mr. Maddox's announcement has startled me,' he said in a tone of sullen dissatisfaction. 'I do not withdraw my statement, but I admit the possibility of having been deceived; I may have mistaken another lady for Miss Longleat. I will respect his Excellency's wishes, and will not again mention the subject. I wish Mr. Maddox joy,' he

added malignantly, 'in his intended marriage with the Premier's daughter.'

'Fill your glasses, gentlemen. Long life and happiness to Mr. Dyson Maddox and his bride-elect!'

The toast was drunk with some enthusiasm. Maddox made a brief reply, and shortly afterwards the company dispersed.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### BEFORE THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT.

CATHCART and Dyson walked together to the lodgings of the latter. Hardly a word was spoken till they entered the sitting-room. Here a fire was burning, and a tray, upon which were glasses and a decanter of spirits, was laid upon the table.

Cathcart poured himself out some brandy, with the remark :

'One needs a pick-me-up after an experience of this sort. What unselfish fools we men are!' he added cynically. 'Why do we expend so much valuable emotion upon a woman who allows herself to become infatuated with a scoundrel, and only exacts interest from outsiders as a tribute to her beauty? What does Honoria Longleat care for me? and yet I have been weak enough to make myself utterly wretched upon her account. Shall I mix for you, o fellow?'

Dyson shook his head and sank wearily into a chair, lifting his hand, with an action that was habitual to him, to brush away the heavy locks that drooped over his forehead. Presently he looked up, and said in a questioning tone :

'I could have done nothing else? There was no other



way of saving her,' he resumed, seeing that Cathcart did not reply. 'If her father had been there she would have been less defenceless; but I am glad that he was absent.'

'This chivalrous sentiment is all moonshine!' said Cathcart, brusquely. 'Do you expect me to believe in your pure disinterestedness?'

'Believe what you choose. It can make no difference to me or to her. Yes, you do believe, for you know me. . . . At one moment I feel a mean cur, at another a fine fellow. I suppose in the abstract it is virtuous to tell lies for a woman's sake. As far as I am concerned, nothing can come of it but personal humiliation. Do you not see? I must tell her what I have done; she may charge me with the worst motives. She *must* show herself at the Opening tomorrow. She will be congratulated upon all sides. Heavens! what a sickening farce! How will she play her part? Oh, my poor Honoria!'

'Miss Longleat is very dramatic,' said Cathcart. 'She will enjoy a scene. I don't think you need pity her so much. As for you, I am not disposed to be very sorry for you either. She will not suspect you of sinister designs. There is a spark of nobility in her nature; it will rise to a flame now.'

'If you had seen her last night,' said Dyson, 'you would have felt as I feel—that there is a gulf between us which must always hold us apart. My love for her—my pity—is deeper than I can express. Her instinct may divine what is in my heart, but she is too proud to endure compassion, and she will turn from me as though I were her enemy.'

'Perhaps so,' said Cathcart. 'I would not venture to predict the disposition of any woman. If I had any influence with her, I should advise her to go away with Mrs. Ferris for a time. Let her return when the Longleat and

Vallancy scandal has died out. This would be best for you too. And now good-night ! I shall stick to my determination of going home to-morrow. I suppose you have nothing to say to me about station business ?

‘Nothing,’ replied Dyson. ‘Good-night ! Thank you.’

Cathcart had made a mental resolution to acquaint Miss Longleat with the facts of the case ; and before ten o’clock the following morning he was at The Bunyas, and had sent up a message begging Honoria to grant him a few moments’ interview. He was shown into the drawing-room, and asked to wait.

Presently Honoria entered, tall and stately, in her trailing black gown, her face white and set, her hands nervously clasped before her. She moved very slowly ; her lips twitched, and her eyes gazed straight before her with a kind of mournful defiance. She looked as though she had nerved herself to encounter an ordeal.

Cathcart began with awkward abruptness :

‘I have called early because I wished particularly to see you before Maddox could be here. I know that he means to come ; he has something to tell you. You—you are going to the Opening, I suppose ?’

Her lips tightened, and a blush overspread her face. Her look seemed to say, ‘You are cruel ;’ but she answered steadily :

‘No, I am not going.’

‘You ought to go—you must go,’ said Cathcart, insistently. ‘After what has happened—for your own sake.’

‘I do not wish to discuss the matter,’ replied Honoria, haughtily.

‘You are angry with me for daring to speak to you. Of course you know that I saw you the night before last. I have tried to shield you from the results of your—your imprudence. . . . But I am a fool to trouble myself about

other people's business. I had better have held my tongue, and allowed Maddox to tell his own tale : it is my weakness to be officious and Quixotic.'

'I am grateful to you,' said Honoria, gently. 'You mean kindly to me, but do you not understand how painful this is to me?'

'You and Maddox are in a disagreeable position—it is air to him that you should hear the facts of the case from an independent witness. There might be danger of misconception, and he is too noble to be allowed to run the risk of that. Last night, at the dinner to General Compton, your relations with Barrington were freely discussed. You were identified as the lady who accompanied him to his lodgings. Your fair fame was at the mercy of these men's tongues. Maddox rose and gave your accuser the lie. There was only one way in which he could effectually protect you from slander. He said that you were his promised wife—that your honour was his to defend. Do you not see? you may save yourself through him. That is what he wishes—only to bear the brunt for you—till all is past and forgotten. Then you may fling him off, if you please, like a glove that is worn out. You will do well to lean upon him. . . . And you must go to the Opening—you have your part to play. You are a brave woman, and you must not fail. . . . Honoria ! you are ill—you are faint ! Can I call anyone?—what can I do?'

Honoria had laid her head upon the back of a high chair, and was shaking with convulsive sobs.

'No—go !' she murmured. 'I have had a bad night ; I do not feel very well. There was no danger of my misconstruing him. I have learned what he is at last. That is true nobility—to bear the burden for one who is despised—humiliated. It was kind of you to come and tell me ; but go now, please, and leave me alone.'

She held out her hand to Cathcart without lifting her head. He pressed it silently, and departed.

For a long while she stood where he had left her, her tears falling like rain, and her bosom heaving with an emotion that was half exultation.

Could she regret her humiliation if it opened before her a vista of purer love—if it taught her to comprehend herself and him?

By-and-by the door opened, and Dyson entered. He started when Honoria turned and faced him; he had not expected that she would be in waiting for him, and had prepared himself for some minutes of miserable suspense. His brow was moody, and his lips locked: his eyes looked almost fierce, so deep were the lines between them. He was carelessly dressed, and had the appearance rather of the explorer than of the suitor.

He saw that she was painfully agitated, and attributed her embarrassment to the remembrance of their last meeting. She was standing when he entered, and gave him her hand without bidding him be seated.

Thus they faced each other.

‘Honoriam!’ he began abruptly, ‘I have come to beg that you will be present at the Opening to-day. There is a painful ordeal before you. I would spare you if I could; but for your own sake it is necessary. Will you go?’

‘The least way in which I can prove my gratitude is to trust you and obey you,’ she said, very low. ‘I will do as you bid me. And who can I trust but you?’

‘You *will* trust me?’ said Dyson. ‘Thank you. I have greater need for your confidence than you know of. I have something to tell you which will pain you deeply. You may think that I have taken an unwarrantable liberty—in-deed, I do not know how to explain. I can but beg you to believe that I acted in the only way possible—for your safety.’

. . . You must know,' he went on, after a moment's pause, seeing that she waited with downcast eyes, 'that such a thing as happened to you the other night is—was—might blast for ever a woman's reputation. I must speak bluntly in order that you may understand. The world is evil-minded, and has no respect for innocency. Last night, at the dinner to General Compton, it was said that you had been seen in company with Barrington. You had been recognised, and a mean cur who was present thought himself at liberty to vilify you. There was only one way in which I could shield you—in which I could silence malicious tongues. I said that you were to be my wife. It is but playing a part for a little while, and then you are free as air. The position will be sorely distasteful to you. Forgive me for placing you in it. It is only less humiliating than that from which you have escaped.'

Honoria looked suddenly up into his face.

'You make nothing of the sacrifice. *This* is humiliation, but it has no pain. I know—I had been told before you came of what you had done for me. . . . Do not think that I could misconstrue your generosity. I am deeply grateful. As you say, we have each a part to act. It is more difficult for you than for me.'

'My mind has changed,' said Dyson, placing a different interpretation upon her words to that which she intended to convey. 'A short time ago I could not have borne this, but I have schooled myself during these months. Look upon me as a puppet, from whom nothing is expected, to whom nothing need be given. It is only for two or three months—nay weeks—for you must go away, and then all this will be past. Can you endure for a few days to be congratulated, to be asked questions, to appear with me occasionally in public? I will spare you in all ways that I can. And you must understand that you commit yourself to

nothing, that whatever I might have wished once is over now—that you need have no fears, no scruples.’

‘I understand,’ she said very coldly, and almost involuntarily drew herself away from him.

Each was fearful of wounding the delicate susceptibilities of the other ; and though the hearts of both were full of yearning, they were held apart by the chill current of misconception that swept between them.

There was silence for several moments. Dyson looked wistfully at Honoria. She, with still face but heaving bosom, held her gaze averted.

‘You will go, then ?’ he said at length.

‘Yes,’ she replied. ‘I will go. It is time that I got ready.’

The clock on the mantelshelf struck eleven as she spoke. It was imperative also that Dyson should prepare for the ceremonial. Honoria turned to leave the room, but as she passed him, arrested her steps, and murmured falteringly :

‘He—he is better ?’

‘He has recovered consciousness,’ replied Dyson, coldly. ‘His symptoms this morning are more favourable. There is no danger. I thought you would wish to know.’

She still paused irresolutely ; then suddenly caught his hand, and lifted to his face her eyes, swimming with unshed tears.

‘You are very good,’ she almost whispered. ‘Oh ! I am grateful. Don’t think hardly of me ; I am very miserable,’ then swiftly left him.

A dose of sal volatile, a toilette, and the necessity for composure, are, in the case of ladies, effectual antidotes to emotion. Honoria stamped down her tremors with an iron foot, and prepared to show a dauntless front to the critical eyes of her little world. She dressed herself in a black gown artistically draped with lace, and placed a bunch of snowy camellias at her throat. A little black lace bonnet

surmounted her fair hair. Her eyes were bright, and had that smarting look which proceeds from over-excitement, and her face was very pale; but except for a slight quivering of her lips, she was perfectly calm.

In the drawing-room she found her father, who was also ready to go to the House. He too had the appearance of having undergone some agitating experience, and of having braced himself to meet Fate. His face was white, but there was a deep red flush upon his brow, and his hands twitched nervously. He advanced to meet his daughter, gazing at her admiringly and triumphantly.

'Honie,' he said, 'Dyson has told me that you have consented to be engaged to him, and that it is all off with that cursed Englishman. Oh, my dear, my dear! you are safe now; whatever happens, *you* are in good keeping. Things are going straight at last. The wish closest my heart will be fulfilled. Tell me, is it really true?'

'It is true that I have consented to be—engaged to Dyson Maddox, and I will never, of my free will, see Mr. Barrington again,' replied Honoria, mechanically.

Her only safeguard against entire collapse lay in self-repression, and in the avoidance of explanations.

Longleat wistfully regarded his daughter.

'Kiss me, Honie, before we start. Kiss me that I may know all is straight between us. No matter whether our ways lie apart or not. So long as all is well with you, I'm happy.'

She laid her hands upon his arm and drew close to him, looking up into his face with a dumb appeal.

'Honie!' he cried, 'my dear, is anything the matter?'

She rested her head for a moment against his shoulder and clung to him, and he kissed her, fondling with his great rough hands her neck and hair.

'Father!' she said only, but her voice was full of yearning.

'We haven't understood each other,' he murmured brokenly, and the tears were in his eyes. 'Men and women are different. There's things men can't overcome—and—and—you're above me. I'm not fit; it's best we should be apart. He'll take my place—and it'll be well with you—that's all—all I care for.'

She understood him. It was a crisis—a farewell.

They clung to each other a moment longer, then went hand in hand to the carriage, and drove together to the Houses of Parliament, where the Premier's daughter, preceded by the Usher of the Black Rod, took her place under the full gaze of many eyes.

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## CHAPTER XL.

### THE ORDEAL.

THOUGH Honoria's guilty self-consciousness had exaggerated the fearfulness of the ordeal, it was still so terrible to her that only the most determined exercise of self-command enabled her to maintain an air of composure, and to support without flinching the many curious glances which were levelled at her.

The report of her engagement had spread as widely as Dyson had intended, and to many of those present at the ceremonial the demeanour of the Premier's daughter afforded greater food for interest than the exposition of the Ministerial policy, which Colonel Augmering delivered in his mildly pompous manner.

General Compton, who in full uniform was standing at the left of the Governor, directed his eyes towards Miss Longleat in a glance of half-admiring, half-impertinent curi-



osity, which Dyson noting, resented with indignation, and of which she herself, though she dared not meet it, was painfully conscious. Uncertain as to who had been present at the dinner-party, Honoria believed that each gentleman who looked at her was mentally charging her with the shame of that midnight esclandre, and saw in the meaning smiles and nods which, upon her entrance, were liberally bestowed upon her, only veiled insolence or contemptuous wonder.

With her humiliating foreknowledge, it seemed to her impossible that the secret of her true relations with Dyson should not be at once divined. Did not his grave look and the deep lines of anxiety between his brows belie all suggestions of triumphant love? And what affinity could her own pale, rigid face and mournful, defiant eyes have with the blushing demureness of the conventional bride-expectant?

Had she been less unhappy the mockery of the situation would have appealed to her sense of the ludicrous; but the old Honoria, who had stood aloof in impatient superiority from the pettiness and vulgarity of the circle in which she lived, and who in the keenest excitement of her thirst after experience had never been able to divest herself of the cynical sense of individuality, had vanished in a night, and there had taken her place a shame-stricken creature, no longer pre-eminent and innocently confident, but unnerved after confronting peril of the kind which to a pure woman is more terrible than death, sick with revulsion, and only sensible of deep personal humiliation, and of an intense need for protection and support.

The actual performance lasted but a few minutes. There had been the usual clatter of guns and braying of instruments, with all the farcical pomposity of the viceregal entrance; then the formal delivery of the speech, and the buzz succeeding its conclusion.

These moments were the crucial test of Honoria's self-

possession. As Lady Georgina Augmering passed out of the chamber she paused, and with a curious expression of sympathetic inquiry and admiring protest upon her handsome face whispered hurriedly :

‘You must come and see me to-morrow and explain matters. I really do not know whether to congratulate you or to condole with you. In fact, I am quite mystified about the whole affair. . . . And then Colonel Augmering has told me—— My dear, I always said that you were in a *most* unfortunate position, and I am sure that in every way my wish has been to countenance you. And Mr. Barrington’s mother having been a friend of mine—I have had a particular interest in you both. But you will confide in me. To-morrow, then, at eleven.’

Lady Georgina’s rapid exit spared Honoria from replying. Then the wife of one of the Ministers, who was sitting next her, bent forward to offer her congratulations and express her pleasurable surprise ; and Miss Nell Little, looking charming in a coquettish bonnet covered with pink rosebuds, exclaimed loud enough to be heard by the President, who smiled and nodded :

‘What a duck you are, Honoria, to give us the fun of a Parliamentary wedding ! It must be an evening affair now that it is not necessary out in Australia to be married in those stupid canonical hours. I think that the least compliment the members could pay the Premier’s daughter would be to club together and give a ball in this building to celebrate the event. I shall suggest it immediately. We have got such a majority that I am certain there would not be the smallest difficulty in passing a vote. It would bang the greatest lark out ; and oh, I am dying to waltz with the new Speaker. My dear, is it true that you have driven Mr. Barrington to desperation, and that he tried to commit suicide in a hansom-cab ? I am told that he has turned into

a baronet. Well, if he is not quite dead there is a chance for some of us yet.'

The whole House, basement and galleries, was in a flutter. The hum of laughter and conversation filled the air. Brightly-clad figures filed in and out among the benches and trooped into the corridors; while the wives and daughters of the new members examined the decorations of the Chamber, and stooped curiously over the books and documents upon the table.

Honorina stood near the dais surrounded by smiling groups, who were offering congratulations and asking eager questions. When had the engagement been arranged? how soon would the marriage take place? etc. Some banteringly commented upon Miss Longleat's silence and preoccupation, while others, bolder or more intimate, rallied her upon her recent flirtation with Barrington. Dyson, watching her from the distance of a few paces, saw her wince beneath the elephantine jokes of some privileged members of the House, and longing to save her from further torture, pressed through the ring which surrounded her, parried several awkward thrusts, and calmly appropriated his *fiancée*, inventing upon the spur of the moment a message from the Premier to the effect that the carriage was waiting.

She clutched his arm convulsively, but did not speak.

'You have behaved bravely,' he whispered, as he placed her in the carriage. 'There is peace before you for the rest of the day. Even if you wished it, I should not advise you to come and listen to the debates this afternoon. I hear rumours of a violent personal attack upon the Premier, and am afraid that the Gundaroo appointment may be mooted again, and that unpleasant insinuations may be made.'

Honorina nodded apathetically.

'But you are certain of support,' she said.

'I don't know what to think. There is an ominous air

of mystery about the other side. However, they are pretty certain to bring all their artillery to bear upon us at once, and we shall soon see what sort of fighting they mean. By the way, your father bade me tell you not to wait for him. You will probably not see him till after the House has risen this evening.'

He gave the order to the coachman, and Honoria drove home alone. Gradually the buzz died out in the streets, and at two o'clock all was still. By three the excitement would be renewed, and the struggle would have commenced; but now the world political and non-political must eat, and while its appetite was being satisfied there would be quiet in the camps.

To Honoria, whose inward vision was so intensely quickened, these outside interests seemed but as specks upon the horizon of her emotions. She ate mechanically, attended to Janie's wants, and listened to the child's prattle, all the time with the sense that there were two distinct personalities imprisoned within her frame: the one palpitating and quivering in response to Barrington's influence, the nervous symptoms of which had never been so acutely felt as now; the other terrified and stricken, clinging to the thought of Maddox as to an anchor which might secure her against the rushing tide of her own passionate impulses. She was afraid of being alone, and had a dread lest she might yield to the desire to communicate with Barrington which was creeping over her. Her only safety seemed to lie in action. She took off the dress she had worn at the Opening, and clad herself in a quiet-coloured gown, wrapping a thick veil round her head; then, taking little Janie by the hand, she set out for a long ramble beside the bank of the river.

Meanwhile the Premier, with an excitement raging in his breast no less keen than that which devoured his daughter, quitted the Parliamentary Buildings immediately the cere-

monial of the Opening was over, and after rapidly traversing a side-street which led towards the river, crossed in the ferry-boat to the south side, and bent his steps in the direction of Adams's Hotel.

With a view to escaping observation, Mrs. Vallancy had wisely chosen her temporary retreat. It was a two-storied wooden building surrounded by trees, and situated close to the bridge, low down upon the banks of the Leichardt. From its position and ready accessibility to the river, it was considerably frequented by commercial travellers and the captains of small vessels which crowded by the wharves or were anchored midway in the stream, and was little known among the upper circles of Leichardt's Town society.

The place appeared quiet and respectable enough. There was a side-entrance, which gave easy approach to a private suite of rooms upon the upper story, which Mr. Longleat imagined to be occupied by Mrs. Vallancy. Anxious to avoid any curious glances of recognition which might be bestowed upon him by the revellers at the bar, he cautiously sheltered himself beneath a row of pines which screened one side of the hotel, and presented himself at the modest private door.

His knock was answered by a comely but untidily-dressed woman, who led a child by the hand. She was, as the Premier supposed, the landlady of the inn. She also at a glance assured herself of the identity of the visitor.

Mr. Longleat, suddenly reflecting that it might be indiscreet to inquire for Mrs. Vallancy under that name, and not knowing whether she had adopted another, stammered, hesitated, and finally asked if there were not a lady staying at the hotel.

'Mrs. Vallancy has been here for three or four days, if you are meaning her,' replied the landlady, boldly. 'She left two hours ago in the *Hydaspes* for Sydney.'

'Left—for Sydney!' repeated Mr. Longleat in dismay, a sudden giddiness seizing him and causing him to stagger up against the door-post. 'You must be mistaken. It cannot be true. Surely—surely you are thinking of some other lady—not of Mrs. Vallancy.'

'I mean Mrs. Vallancy who was living at Emu Point. There is only one of that name in Leichardt's Town that I know of. I was her father's housemaid long ago, before I married Adams and came to this house. I ought to know her well. She had her reasons for keeping quiet for a few days. I was sorry for her, poor thing, though I don't want to make out that she was an angel; it is not the men's fault if women are that. I was fond of her for the sake of old times, and I went down with her to the steamer this morning and helped her to get off.'

'I—am a friend of Mrs. Vallancy's,' faltered the Premier. My name is Longleat. I see that you know me. You may have heard her speak of me. Did she leave no message—no letter? I had an appointment with her here to-day.'

'There is a letter for you, sir, but it is not here,' replied the woman, civilly. Mrs. Vallancy bade me tell you, in case you should call, that she had written to you to explain why she had left Leichardt's Land.'

'And there was nothing more?'

'Nothing more, sir,' repeated Mrs. Adams.

Mr. Longleat stooped to pat the little boy's head, as much with the object of concealing his agitation as from his invariable impulse of tenderness towards children. He placed five shillings in the chubby hand, and would have gone to devour his disappointment as best he might; but as he lifted his head and met the landlady's eyes, a look which he saw in them, at once curious, contemptuous, and compassionate, arrested him.

'Do *you* know why she went away?' he asked pointedly. 'Had her husband found her out? Had she received letters? What induced her to make up her mind so suddenly? My good woman, tell me all that you can. There, there is something for the child;' and Mrs. Adams's fingers closed over two bright pieces of gold.

Clearly, here was a source of benefit not to be lightly disdained. And there was no obligation upon her to be silent upon Mrs. Vallancy's business; on the contrary, her woman's heart yearned for a gossip. Mrs. Adams looked at the Premier, hesitated, smiled, and retreated further into the passage.

'You *can* tell me something!' exclaimed Longleat, whose anxiety was intensified by an undefined fear. 'You are in Mrs. Vallancy's confidence. Come, speak out your mind; tell me all that you know. I will make it worth your while.'

There was a door upon the right-hand side of the passage. Mrs. Adams opened it, and led the way into a small parlour.

'You had best come in here, sir,' she said; 'I don't want my husband to know anything about the matter. I wasn't, as you may say, in Mrs. Vallancy's confidence, but I think that I know why she has gone to Sydney—more's the pity!'

'Go on,' said Mr. Longleat impatiently, standing with his hands clasped upon the table, and his face flushed and eager.

'I knew Mrs. Vallancy when she was a girl, sir. As I said, I was three years housemaid at her father's, before I left to marry Adams. I was there at the time of Miss Constance's engagement to Mr. Fielding. Did you know of that, sir?'

Yes, Mr. Longleat had known of it. There had been much gossip upon the subject during the period of Fielding's

late sojourn in Leichardt's Town. The Premier remembered his jealousy of Fielding in the days of his budding passion for Constance, and her calm admission of the old engagement when he had taxed her with too strong an interest in the handsome squatter. He nodded, and Mrs. Adams went on :

'Miss Constance was vain and flighty, but I am certain that Mr. Fielding was the only man she ever really loved. There's more behind than I know. She has quarrelled with her husband—that much she told me ; and now she has gone to her ruin. Last night a telegram came to her from Mr. Fielding——'

'What was the wording of that telegram ?' cried Longleat, hoarsely. 'You saw it. Tell me. I'll give you five pounds to tell me.'

'I saw it,' assented Mrs. Adams. 'There was nothing to prevent me from reading it. It was lying open on the dressing-table. Miss Constance was always careless about her letters and things. As well as I remember, it went like this : "I leave here to-morrow ; will meet you in Sydney. Telegraph at once by what steamer you will arrive. I will make all arrangements." It was dated from Melbourne. I took her answer and sent it myself. It was to say that she was going by the *Hydaspes* to-day, and that he was to meet her at an hotel. I forget the name. I knew what that meant well enough ; and, before I took the message, I begged and prayed her to think what she was doing. I told her it would be better for her to go back and live with her husband, even if he were to beat her and starve her, than to throw away her chance of keeping an honest woman. But it was no use. She was determined. All she would say was : 'It's too late now, Bessie.' So at last I gave up trying to persuade her, and helped her to settle things as best I could. I went with her to the steamer, and took her



passage under a false name, so that folks shouldn't know where she had gone. She had a lot of money with her. I can't tell you how much, or where she got it; but all I know is, that Fielding couldn't have sent it; and jewellery—rings, and lockets, and bracelets—I never saw the like. There was a cheque for a hundred pounds, she said you had lent her; that I got cashed at the bank. No fear of her coming to want. Underneath her dress she was wearing a necklace of diamonds that looked good enough for a queen. I caught a sight of it when she opened her bodice, where she had sewed up her money, to get me a note for paying her passage. I told her she'd be getting herself murdered on board by some of those rascally Chinese, if she let them see what was round her neck; but she only laughed, and said the diamonds were paste, and they made a great show for next to nothing. There might be truth in that. I don't want to think too hardly of Miss Constance, but there were things said about her and other people that I'd be loth to believe. I am glad that she has gone, and that my hands are clear of the business. I haven't dared tell my husband what has come to her—he that prided himself upon keeping his house respectable—and the only comfort I've got is, that she was so bent upon her own way, it was no good trying to hold her back. My belief is that she was right, and that it *was* too late. There! be quiet, Tommy. Don't you see that mother is talking? Drat the boy! What's he after now?

It was, perhaps, fortunate that Mrs. Adams's garrulous propensities spared Longleat the necessity for making any commentary upon her tale, and that her attention was at its close diverted from observation of her hearer to the vagaries of Tommy, who, having possessed himself of a knife that had been lying upon the table, darted from the room and led his mother a scamper down the passage and into the

bar, where a brief colloquy with her husband delayed Mrs. Adams still further, and enabled Longleat to overcome, unwitnessed, the first outbreak of his wrath and agitation. He staggered like a drunken man, striking vainly with his clenched fist in the air, as he muttered between his teeth :

‘By ——, I have been fooled !’

His heart palpitated wildly, and the room seemed to reel before him. The blood forsook his head. For a moment he knew not what had happened, and half-fancied, when he came to himself, that the fit which for months he had inwardly dreaded had seized him at last. But with the sound of the woman’s returning footsteps the animal courage of the man reasserted itself. He shook his burly frame, and though the moisture stood in great drops upon his brow, and his knees shook so that he was obliged to steady himself by grasping the table for support, he lifted his head and met her inquisitive glance bravely, saying, with a pitiful effort to resume his usual manner :

‘I am very sorry for what you have told me, if it is true ; but, being a friend of Mrs. Vallancy’s, I can hardly believe that it is so. Mrs. Vallancy, doubtless, had private reasons for wishing to leave Leichardt’s Town. I can guess what they were ; and it is natural that she should have asked Mr. Fielding to meet her in Sydney. You might do a great deal of harm by gossiping about the matter. . . . And that cheque which you cashed. I do not wish it known that I lent Mrs. Vallancy money. She had calls upon her—in— in discharging which I offered to assist her ; but it would annoy me greatly were my name to transpire in connection with her. My good woman, you are well-meaning I am sure. I shall be glad if you will accept this little present from me as the—as a recognition of your silence and discretion.’

He fumbled in his pocket-book, and produced a bank-note, which he placed on the table before her.

Mrs. Adams, needing no further confirmation of her suspicions, quietly folded it up and put it in her pocket. She felt certain that the donor of the diamonds, and the supplier of the mysterious cash which had been secreted upon Mrs. Vallancy's person, stood before her. She was not compassionate of the Premier's discomfiture. A man old enough to be a grandfather, she argued, deserved to be fleeced and then flouted by a designing young woman, with whom he had been weak enough to become infatuated. Of the trio, Mrs. Adams's sympathies flowed far more freely towards Brian Fielding, whom memory designated as a 'real gentleman,' and worthy of a better fate than to be saddled with such an encumbrance as Constance Vallancy.

'I understand, sir,' she replied stiffly. 'I am not given to gossiping, and if I were, I have too much self-respect to mix myself up with such a matter. Of course I knew that you took a particular interest in Mrs. Vallancy, or I should not have spoken as I have done. You look upset, sir. Perhaps I can bring you a glass of something. I can easily fetch it, if you wish.'

'No—no,' said Longleat. 'Good-morning.'

'You may depend upon me, sir,' said Mrs. Adams, as she attended him to the door.

He passed out, and she closed it after him, the richer for the visit by several sovereigns, not counting Tommy's odd five shillings.

Instead of re-crossing by the ferry-boat, as he had come, the Premier turned to his right and walked on over the bridge. The ground still seemed unsteady beneath his feet, and the noise of the traffic buzzed in his ears. He knocked up against a pedestrian and mechanically apologised: afterwards picking his steps more carefully.

The only feeling of which he was strongly conscious was a necessity for movement. It seemed to him that if he

stood still for a moment dizziness would get the better of him, and he must fall to the ground.

He strode on, like a man in a dream, till he reached the Treasury. He entered his office, and looked at the letters which had accumulated upon his table since the morning, but among them there was none from Constance. Touching a gong, he summoned a clerk from an outer office, and desired that all letters which arrived for him that day should be sent by special messenger to the House, and delivered to him there.

He observed that the man eyed him curiously, and when he was alone looked at himself in the glass above the mantelshelf, straightened his collar, smoothed his hair, and endeavoured to shape his features into their normal expression; then a terrible, sickening sense of revolt overcame him. He flung his arms heavily upon the marble shelf, and struck his head against them.

'My God!' he cried, 'I cannot bear it—I cannot bear it!'

He remained so for several moments, clenching his hands, and beating his forehead in passionate rebellion against the fate which had worked the ruin of all his hopes. Yet it was characteristic of the man that he uttered no execration against the woman who had made him her dupe. Constance Vallancy seemed to him less the being who had wronged him than the instrument of a remorseless destiny.

If he had sinned, retribution had followed his crime.

He had a feverish anxiety to know how Constance excused her falsity. Her letter had been probably directed to The Bunyas; it had been foolish of him not to go there at once. He put on his hat and walked forth, choosing the least-frequented side of the road, and shunning the recognition of passers-by who brushed up against him.

In Alfred Street, leading to the Houses of Parliament, excited groups discussed the viceregal speech, and the pro-

bable result of the afternoon session. Strange to say, the political crisis which but a short time ago had been the dominant interest in Longleat's mind, seemed now to have sunk into insignificance, and in spite of the many portentous signs around him, the Premier was absolutely unsuspecting of the grave nature of the Oppositionist attack.

It was now nearly three o'clock, and members were on their way back to the House. To most of them Longleat as he strode past was an object of interest, and several hailed him by his name; but he took no notice, steadily pursuing his way with his eyes upon the ground, until he reached his own dwelling.

He entered by the side-gate and betook himself to the study, where by his orders all letters that arrived during his absence were placed in readiness for his perusal. A miscellaneous collection strewed the table, but still there was none from Mrs. Vallancy. He summoned a servant and delivered the same order that he had given to the clerk of the Treasury.

He asked whether anyone had been at The Bunyas since the morning, and was informed that Dyson Maddox had called twice, and that the Attorney-General had also inquired for him, and had appeared anxious to see him before the House reopened.

The Premier wondered vaguely what fresh political agitation was afloat; but the sensation of giddiness and of vital collapse seemed still to numb his reasoning faculties. It would hardly have cost him a pang had he then been informed of the crushing blow in store for him; indeed, it may be doubted whether at the moment his mental powers were equal to taking a review of his position.

He felt the need of a stimulant to sustain his energies, and opening a private cellaret, poured out a glass of brandy, and drank it at a gulp. Fortified by the draught, he went

out again. It was barely ten minutes' walk from The Bunyas to the Parliamentary Buildings, and the clock struck the half-hour as he ascended the great stone steps, and then entered the Assembly Chamber.

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE IMPEACHMENT OF THE PREMIER.

THE House was filling rapidly when Longleat took his place at the head of the Ministerial bench to the right of the Speaker's chair. There was a pregnant silence in the atmosphere which betokened expectancy of something unusual and interesting. A bystander, ignorant of the personal current which underlay the strife of political parties, would certainly have noted and marvelled at the shadow of troubled gravity which clouded the faces of the members as they filed into their seats. There was no buzz of conversation—no cheery interchange of jokes. The Ministers looked thoughtful, and whispered together with an uneasy air of assurance. The Leader of the Opposition, after calmly surveying the House in the manner of a general who calculates the chances of victory and defeat, smiled sardonically and buried his head over a pile of notes. It was remarked that whereas the cross-benches were fuller than usual, the two sides of the House were more fairly balanced than could have been anticipated from the result of the recent elections. There was a significant solemnity in the attitudes of all present. The Sergeant-at-Arms sat like a picture of Time with his hour-glass. The new Speaker, nervous under the consciousness of his lately-donned trappings, had yet stiffened with a certain artificial dignity beseeeming the gravity of the occasion, so

that the brief prayers which inaugurated the proceedings seemed less a solemn farce than the prelude to deliberations of deep and agitating interest.

Certain formal business was transacted. A petition, which censured a particular Government measure during the recess, was read and laid upon the table. The Speaker made his short report; and then one of the new members rose to move the appointment of a committee to prepare, and afterwards, the adoption of the Address in reply to the Speech. The Ministerial programme was commented upon more critically than approvingly. The orator was an old colonist who prided himself upon being a free-lance, and who cherished mildly emphatic views, which for years he had been longing to air in the Assembly, and which, from their varied nature, imparted a savour of irrelevancy to his remarks.

But all this was child's play. The Premier sat, his head bowed, unhearing, unheeding. The hours were growing, and surely it was time that he should receive Constance's letter. His mind was crowded with images and conjectures which obscured his outer vision, and it was with difficulty that he brought himself to the point of replying lucidly to a question put to him by one of his colleagues, and roused himself by a vigorous effort to comment upon a point of order which had been raised by a truculent member upon the Opposition side.

The mover's speech was prosy, and there were increasing signs of impatience visible among the occupants of the benches and the galleries. Still the leader of the Opposition sat brooding over his notes, quietly biding his time when, as several there predicted, he would spring forth like a lion from his lair.

The Address was duly seconded by a more strictly Ministerial adherent. Then, just as the dusk was falling, Mr.

Middleton slowly rose, and with his hands in his waistcoat-pockets, balanced himself upon the very edge of the step upon which he stood, and with a bland smile and studied air of repression addressed himself to the chair.

No lamb could at the onset have bleated more mildly. He complimented the honourable member for Nerang upon the admirable manner in which the Adoption of the Address in reply had been moved. . . . He was sure that the honourable member, from his long labours as a colonist and varied experience, would be a most valuable addition to the House, etc. . . . He believed that it had been usual upon various occasions, before dealing with the proposals of the Government, to comment upon the proceedings of the Ministry during the recess. . . . The recently published list of appointments and dismissals in the departments of the Minister for Works and the Postmaster-General called for attention. The frequent use by members of the Government of special trains, and the abuse of telegraphic privileges, were matters to which he thought it necessary to make allusion. The ratification of certain contracts without the authority of the House invited censure ; and so on, in a soft strain of animadversion, till the leading features of the Ministerial policy—the Kooya railway and the great Loan Bill—were trenchantly assailed. Then smooth generalisations became pointed personalities. The speaker's voice waxed louder, and his gesticulations more impressive. Fire darted from his eyes, and venom gathered upon his tongue. Each word bore a carefully primed and cutting reference to the Premier. It was evident that he had risen to attack, not the policy, but the man.

During the last session, he cried at the close of this preliminary peroration, the Premier had announced that it was his determination to stand or fall upon the question of Southern Railway Extension. Upon that ostensible point



of division between Government and Opposition, honourable members now seated in the House were supposed to have taken sides. . . . How many had deeply considered the true interests of the colony, and had seriously represented to their constituents the real bearings of the question, was a matter of private opinion. . . . The Premier had trafficked upon his personal prestige, and, by dint of affected magnanimity and overwhelming braggadocio, had contrived to worm himself into the confidence of the country ; but it was his—Mr. Middleton's—opinion that only a sharp revulsion—which the disclosure of certain hidden facts, impeaching the character of the Premier as a citizen and a statesman, must inevitably produce—was needed to turn the tide of popular feeling against the lavish expenditure of borrowed money upon public works, and to condemn the Government policy as strenuously as it now appeared to be advocated. . . .

After a tirade upon the purely unselfish and patriotic motives by which he himself was actuated, the leader of the Opposition continued :

It had yet to be ascertained what was the result of the late General Election (excited cries of 'Hear, hear' from the Government benches) ; and the true value of the Premier's personal and political prestige required to be tested by the light of an extraordinary and unexpected revelation, which in the course of the last few days—he might almost say hours—had horrified and undeceived him.

These disclosures had, contrary to his own inclination, been forced upon him. Subsequent inquiries which he had made, and which, he might add, were now in further progress, had confirmed them, and he felt it his duty, in the present condition of political affairs, and in the face of a critical measure affecting the most vital interests of the colony, to place before the House the facts which had been brought under his notice.

With the instinct of defence, Dyson Maddox rose to ask whether the charges to which the honourable member alluded bore directly upon the political career of the Premier.

Mr. Middleton asserted that they had a strong if indirect bearing upon the honourable gentleman's connection with the politics of Leichardt's Land.

A point of order was mooted and hotly discussed. It was declared that the leader of the Opposition was not justified in bringing forward charges against any honourable member which did not come under the jurisdiction of the House. Several members spoke, and it was finally weakly ruled by the Speaker that Mr. Middleton should be allowed to proceed.

During the opening of Mr. Middleton's speech, Longleat had sat indifferent and motionless, with that dazed expression upon his face which upon his entrance had attracted universal attention, and had caused the whisper to go round that the Premier looked as though he had had a fit. It was expected at the onset that he would rise in hot wrath and indignantly repudiate his enemy's accusations, and the gallery eagerly anticipated the culmination of an already sufficiently thrilling debate in a stormy scene, which should be unparalleled in the annals of the House.

But Longleat allowed the question of order—clearly his opportunity for protest—to pass by, and indeed seemed too deeply absorbed in the examination of a packet of letters which had been brought in and handed to him, to take any heed of the altercation. Before him was Constance Valancy's cold confession of her infatuation for Fielding; of her calm determination, seeing that shame must inevitably be her portion, to combine the reward of such love as hers with the penalty of social degradation; her expression of thanks for his *kindness*; her formal regret that henceforth their paths must lie apart; her hope that in the not very dis-

tant future he might meet with a woman who could honourably bear his name, and be a second mother to his children.

It was a sorry consummation to the sinful projects which had dominated alike his affection for his daughter and his political ambition, and had heated him to a fiercer fever-pitch than the most burning impulses of youth.

A passion rushing with all the impetuosity of middle age, and suddenly checked, is more overwhelming in its disastrous effect than the most terrible outside calamity. Longleat's head dropped upon his breast. The room became all blackness. The voices of the disputants sounded in his ears like the roaring of threatening waves. It seemed to him, later on, that he had been seized with unconsciousness, though he knew not for how long.

When he awoke to light and hearing his brain surged, and he had a confused sense of impending ruin which it was useless to try and avert ; and it was some minutes before he was able to grasp the meaning of Mr. Middleton's denunciatory harangue.

It was about this point that he took up the thread of his adversary's oration.

The career of the honourable gentleman now sitting at the head of the Government had for the last twenty years been brought too prominently before the public to require comment in that place. . . .

Mr. Longleat had not sought to hide the fact that he had commenced life in the colony as a bullock-driver upon the Kooya road ; he had openly gloried in his elevation, by means of his single-handed exertions, to the high position he now held. He had started in Leichardt's Land from almost the first rung of the ladder, and though in the minds of some, suspicion had lain latent, no one had taken the trouble to inquire from what lower level he had sprung.

Cries of 'Shame !' 'Order !' 'Hear, hear !' sounded

through the Chamber. . . . It was to a period antecedent to that which embraced the Leichardt's Land stage of the Premier's history that he, Mr. Middleton, wished to call the attention of honourable members of that House.

The Leader of the Opposition paused pointedly. All eyes were bent towards the Ministerial bench, and fixed themselves upon Longleat. The Premier lifted his head; his mouth twitched; he turned irresolutely to his colleagues, and half rose from his seat. Then an expression of dogged desperation settled upon his features; his head drooped again, and his eyes were lowered upon the carpet.

To the gallery his silence seemed to imply disdain; but among the members who were in ignorance of Middleton's drift, there was a movement of mistrust and alarm. This was not the line of attack which had been anticipated. It had been supposed that Government measures during the recess would be called into question, and upon various points the Ministers were armed with retaliating arguments, though the volley of aimless abuse which they had expected had not, to their minds, appeared to demand any special strategic defence.

But the cutting gravity and evident conviction with which Mr. Middleton spoke, suggested more serious possibilities. Could it be that a mystery lay hidden in the past life of the Premier which would dishonour him in the sight of men—that a crime, the heinousness of which warranted its being brought forward under present circumstances—was to be laid to his charge? It occurred to several to demur at the informality of the proceedings; and one or two black sheep reflected inwardly upon the unpleasant consequences to be apprehended from an indiscriminate investigation into the obscurity of private history. A further protest was made against the irrelevancy of the discussion, and Mr. Middleton hotly defended his line of conduct. The past of great men,

he urged—and he was far from denying that the Premier had achieved greatness of no ordinary kind in the annals of a young nation—was the property of the State ; how much more so when in a momentous crisis, such as was made evident by the present juncture of political affairs, the faith of the colony was pinned upon its principal legislator ! The charge he had to make did not touch upon the Premier's position as a private member of the House, in which case it would be obviously unnecessary and ill-judged to drag out of the mire past incidents in his former life which might be buried in oblivion ; but upon his position as the political leader of an important colony, who had identified himself so completely with the interests of Leichardt's Land that her very credit and reputation might be said to have become embodied in the person of her representative. It was but just that the country should be made aware what manner of man had sneaked into the good graces of the public, and assumed the reins of power. . . . He would make his statement. Let the Premier deny it if he was able. . . . When the matter had been placed before the House, he, Mr. Middleton, would leave it to the judgment of the Speaker and of honourable members to determine, whether the extraordinary circumstances of the case admitted of any other line of action on his part.

Suddenly Longleat rose. He folded his arms, and, with a look of defiant desperation, surveyed the House, while he thundered forth :

‘Well, then, let the honourable member for North Leichardt's Land say what he has got to say agen me.’

The groans and hisses, which proceeded from upstairs, drowned Mr. Middleton's accusing voice, and a bushman, leaning over the railings, shouted :

‘Speak up and let's have done with it. It ain't the Premier that's a sneak and a liar.’

A commotion ensued. It was ruled that the galleries should be cleared, and the excited and disappointed crowd was forcibly ejected. The substance of Middleton's lengthy prelude and accusation may be briefly summarised :

That in the year 18— Thomas Prancard, a youth employed upon the estate of Sir Henry Calders, Bart., of Calderwoods, in Suffolk, England, had upon the occasion of a poaching affray, during which he, with others, had gone to the assistance of the keepers, shot Captain Harry Calders, the eldest son of his master, through the heart. The two young men having quarrelled some days previously, it was supposed that Prancard had made use of this opportunity to commit a deliberate murder, and had endeavoured to disarm suspicion by a semblance of accident ; but at the trial, which took place some months later, the supposed seduction of Prancard's sister by the deceased had thrown an extenuating light upon the motive of the murder. A verdict of guilty had been coupled with a recommendation to mercy, and a sentence of penal servitude for the term of twenty-one years had been passed upon the prisoner.

That Thomas Prancard had been transported to Western Australia, but that, on account of certain services rendered upon the occasion of a convict outbreak against the authorities, his term of punishment had been curtailed, and at the expiration of fourteen years he had received his discharge and had quitted the colony.

That he had been known at Ballarat Diggings and at other places under the alias of Thomas Longleat, and had, under that name, entered into partnership as a bullock-driver with one Jem Bagot, a ticket-of-leave man.

That papers containing a full account of the trial and conviction, and proofs of the identity of Thomas Prancard with the honourable gentleman who represented Kooya, should be laid before the House.

Mr. Middleton, with a brief justification of his part in the discharge of this painful duty, and a finely-turned, somewhat sarcastic appeal to the judgment of that honourable House to decide whether it was conducive to the reputation of the colony that, at this most important crisis in its history, a convicted murderer should hold the reins of government, and appear before the Imperial authorities as the chosen representative of Leichardt's Land. . . .

An old member rose, and, after carefully asserting his independence of personal bias, proceeded to take a temperate view of the allegations which had been hurled at the Premier. . . . Never, during the whole course of his Parliamentary experience, had he assisted at a more painful debate. . . . In the annals of colonial legislature there was no precedent for such a scene as had taken place. . . . He thought that, as the matter had gone so far, it ought to be thoroughly investigated and cleared up. But this should be done outside the walls of that House. These charges ought not to go forth to the world unless they were disproved or substantiated. He, for his part, did not attach any importance to the accusations which had been brought against the Premier. He was convinced that Mr. Middleton had been the dupe of evil-disposed persons whose object it was to ruin the credit of the Government, and that the leader of the Opposition would find it a difficult matter to supply the evidence which was wanting to corroborate his statements. . . . The whole story carried absurdity upon its face. Was it probable that, had the tale been true, it would not have leaked out ere now? It was his opinion that nothing more than an emphatic denial on the part of the Premier was needed to set doubts at rest upon both sides of the House. He deplored that at the onset of the session the attention of the House should be devoted to a merely sensational subject, to the exclusion of important business, etc., etc.

There was a brief whispered consultation among the Ministers. Dyson Maddox bent forward and spoke to the Premier :

‘You will answer this cowardly attack?’

Longleat’s head was still bent ; he lifted it, and exhibited a ghastly face to his colleague.

‘Good God!’ exclaimed Dyson, startled by his appearance. ‘What has happened to you? Are you ill?’

‘I—I am ill,’ repeated Longleat, speaking in a hollow tone, with a hesitating emphasis upon his words. ‘There’s something the matter—with my head. For God’s sake, get the House adjourned. . . . I am—not equal to making a speech. . . . Of course it is all a d—d lie; you don’t want me to swear that, I suppose? I tell you that I am ill. I think that I have had a sort of fit. The whole thing may go to the devil, for what I care!’

‘You *must* deny the charge,’ urged Dyson. ‘Make an effort. Don’t you see that everyone’s eyes are upon you? Collect yourself, and get up and give Middleton the lie.’

The confused buzz which had spread down each side of the Chamber, and was rapidly deepening into a roar, drowned the brief colloquy between the Ministers.

Cries of ‘Order!’ ‘Shame!’ ‘Speak up like a man!’ sounded above the tumult. The excitement had become so personal and intense that all other considerations were swept before it as straws in the face of a wind. To restore order was beyond the power of any brand-new Speaker; and indeed that functionary, forgetting the burden of his lately-acquired dignity, and absorbed by the interest of the scene, leaned forward over his desk, and, fixing upon Longleat a gaze of eager curiosity, joined in the general murmur of expectation.

The death-like pallor of the Premier’s face, his downcast attitude and evident hesitation to meet the charge, had



caused a thrill of doubt to rush through the Assembly, and, by the wonder-loving and malevolent, were construed into a half admission of guilt.

But distrust was soon succeeded by a revulsion. Longleat rose. He stepped forward with his burly form erect, his chest heaving, and his under-lip protruding, in ghastly mockery of his usual attitude while haranguing the people.

His gaze, half-wrathful, half-desperate, swept the House from the Speaker's chair to below the bar, and a profound silence fell upon the noisy occupants of the benches. Upon every face, save that of the leader of the Opposition, which was sneering and impassive, there was depicted the most breathless anxiety.

With the consciousness of personal influence there came once more to Longleat the strong sense of predominance. He spoke. Never had his voice rung out more sonorously. Never had his rough, powerful oratory made its mark more surely. He thundered forth defiance of his enemies. He inveighed against the conversion of an honourable debate into a vehicle for falsehood and calumny. He appealed to the confidence of his friends—to the country which he had faithfully served—to the Parliament of Leichardt's Land, towards which he had never failed in respect.

He denied, upon his honour as a member of that House, that he had ever committed a crime punishable by the laws of England, that he had ever been in Western Australia in his life, or had heard the name of Prancard before that afternoon. The sweat stood in great drops upon his brow; he staggered and fell heavily to his seat; he knew that he had struck his last blow.

Dyson Maddox rose to make a brief explanation on the part of his colleague. The Premier, he stated, had since the meeting of the House been attacked by sudden illness. Only the urgency of the occasion had induced him to re-

main through the debate, and had enabled him to deliver the powerful speech to which they had listened. He was physically unequal to further argument or contradiction. The monstrous nature of the charge must be evident to all, and called for no comment upon the part of the Government beyond the Premier's vigorous denial. It remained now for the leader of the Opposition to make good his case. . . . He, Maddox, desired to call again the Speaker's attention to the irrelevancy of the discussion to the subject at issue, and moved formally the adjournment of the House, for the resumption of the debate upon the Address in reply, under more seemly conditions.

Mr. Middleton stepped forward mid groans and hisses, and for some time was not allowed to proceed. At last, with difficulty, he obtained a hearing for his statement. That he would not oppose the motion of the Minister for Lands for the adjournment of the debate; that upon the day but one following he would be in a position to present further and conclusive evidence in support of the charge he had brought against the Premier, and that he was ready to lay all papers connected with it upon the table of the House.

There was a slight altercation as to whether the House should or should not be adjourned. An independent member deplored the personal attack upon the Premier, but vindicated the right of the House to pass judgment upon the charge. Honourable members, he averred, might abuse each other with impunity during the heat of debate, but such an accusation, directed against the political leader of the colony, would go forth to the world and cover the Chamber with disgrace, unless disproved and repudiated. . . . He had of course heard rumours that the Government was to be attacked, but he had little thought that a charge of this kind would be brought forward, or that the leader of the Opposition would make himself responsible for it.

'I accept the responsibility,' gravely affirmed Mr. Middleton.

A member upon the Government side spoke next in hot defence of his chief, concluding with a vigorous denunciation of the tactics of his opponents. . . . This, then, was the grand Opposition attack—this their noble policy. . . . They did not care for a policy to be advocated for the colony so long as they could impeach the Premier. . . . The business of the country might go to the dogs provided their leader got on the Treasury bench. . . . Finally, the motion was put and passed in the affirmative, and the House broke up.

The members gathered in excited groups below the bar, some lingering, others passing eagerly to the smoking-room or crowding in the lobby. Middleton was among the first to disappear; it was evident that he was not desirous of an encounter with the Premier. Dyson Maddox stood beside his chief, the centre of a knot of Ministers, who talked excitedly, more among themselves than to their leader. Several of the Ministerial supporters approached and expressed their horror and indignation at Middleton's attack, and their sympathy with the Premier in his indisposition. But their overtures were awkwardly offered and apathetically received. Longleat hardly replied. Of what consequence would it be on the morrow whether his comrades believed him to be a murderer to-day? Of what use to continue struggling against fate, which had evidently doomed him to destruction?

A reactionary wave of doubt had succeeded the enthusiasm with which his denial had been greeted. In the minds of all, there lurked an uneasy consciousness that something was amiss. The word 'murder' has an ugly sound, and the shock of the accusation had been so startling that the members had been unable to collect their thoughts sufficiently to reason calmly upon the charge. The whole pro-

ceeding had been unconstitutional, unprecedented. The impeachment had shaken even well-seasoned nerves. Though the convict taint is not unknown in the Chambers of Australian legislature, perhaps nowhere is it more severely reprobated. Had the Premier been convicted of a political error, a moral peccadillo, or even of malpractices in his administration, there were many to whom the misdemeanour would have appeared comparatively trivial.

Bureaucratic morality in Australia admits of wide generalisations, and though the *liaison* with Mrs. Vallancy and bestowal of the Gundaroo appointment upon her husband had gone far towards weakening Longleat's social reputation, his political prestige had not been impaired; but this stroke at the very root of the Premier's character, this bold assertion of duplicity and crime in a career which for twenty years had appeared open and honourable, was too grave a matter to be lightly dismissed. The deepest convictions were undermined, and those who but a few hours before had only dreamed of applauding, were now startled into something like condemnation.

After the first natural recoil many reasoned among themselves that a man so astute as Mr. Middleton would have hesitated to bring forward a charge which he was unable to substantiate; others maintained that the whole proceeding was a last coup on the part of a revengeful minority, and that the story had been trumped up with a view to awaken distrust and cripple the forces of the Government; while others, granting that the leader of the Opposition had been misled by false information, defended his conduct in bringing the matter before Parliament instead of attacking the Premier through the medium of the newspapers or allowing the information to leak out through private channels.

Longleat spoke in constrained tones, with his eyes again upon the ground.

'I am ready,' he said, in answer to the eager inquiries with which he was beset, 'to meet this calumny—to prove how monstrous it is. I can say no more. . . . Little, you will hear from me the first thing to-morrow. I—I am not myself to-night, as you see. An attack of the heart. I am subject to them occasionally. It—it seized me immediately after the Opening this morning. I had doubts about being present at the debate, but I—as you know—I have never neglected my duty to the public. Good-night! Dyson, perhaps you will walk with me to the corner. I must go home.'

'It was a fit,' said one of the members, who was a doctor, to the Minister for Works. 'If anything happens to-night I shall not be in the least surprised. I have seen it coming on for weeks. These bull-necked men are never safe. Only his temperate habits have, till the last few months, kept him in health; and you may depend upon it, the strain of the elections, and excitement from other causes—you know what I mean—have conduced to this sort of thing.'

The speaker made a significant gesture with his hand to his mouth, which was a calumny indeed as far as Longleat was concerned, but which was the source of a malignant report circulated later.

'A queer story that of Middleton's,' continued the doctor. 'Now I begin to understand the rumours that have been flying about during the last two days. They say that Valancy, who is mad about his wife, has had something to do with it. By the way, there's a story afloat that she went off in the *Hydaspes* to-day, to join Fielding in Sydney—can that have had anything to do with the Premier's sudden attack?—and that old Ferris, the cracked storekeeper at Kooralbyn, supplied the information. There was something deucedly odd about his connection with Longleat. Well, after all, it is not so very unlikely. They call it murder, but hang me

if I don't think that a man is half-justified in killing another man for seducing his sister! Women are always at the bottom of mischief. And Vallancy gets his revenge, though I should think it is rather a good thing for him to have got quit of his wife. . . Things come pretty square in this world. . . It is not particularly creditable to the colony to have an *old hand* at the head of affairs, but I don't see that it makes much odds to his policy.'

This latitudinarian view of the case admitted of free argument. Meanwhile the Premier, accompanied by Dyson, had left the Chamber.

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## CHAPTER XLII.

### LAST WORDS.

LEANING upon Dyson's arm, Longleat walked down the corridor and descended the stone steps by which the great door of the Parliamentary Buildings was approached.

The night was dark and murky. It was about eight o'clock ; the moon had not yet risen, and only the great lamps above the gateway and the starlike lights of the town illuminated the blackness. Against one of the pillars at the entrance crouched an elf-like human form, which, suddenly raising itself, stepped forward and confronted the Premier.

A ray from the lantern above shone upon the leering lips and malicious eyes of Sammy Deans ; but Longleat, walking uncertainly with his gaze fixed upon vacancy, and unconscious of all save his own miserable personality, would have passed the free-selector by, had not Sam's strident voice, lifted in tones of devilish triumph, arrested his attention.

‘Mr. Longleat, or Mr. Prancard—it ain’t no odds by which name I call you—there be nothing more to settle between you and me. I’ve taken my revenge for the months in gaol you gev me, and fur the little chap that cried to kiss his feyther afore he died. . . . I said that I’d bring disgrace upon you and your proud miss, who, for all her pride, is no better than her mother before her. I’ve done what I meant to do. ’Twur me as gev Vallancy the papers, and put him on the scent, and showed him how to prime Middleton. Happen, that for all your money and your brag and your popularity, you’ll never hold up your head in that House again. Leichardt’s Land has done with you. Go home and tell your girl, that looks down enough on you a’ready, that her father’s been nigh to having the rope round his neck, and that she is no more than a convict’s daughter.’

‘By God!’ cried Longleat, furiously. ‘So it is you, is it, Sammy Deans. and you have been getting hold of Anthony Ferris when he was drunk, and sucking in his lies. But I’ll be even with you yet!’

He made a spring at the free-selector and clutched Sam by the throat, shaking him as though he had been a dog.

Dyson interposed, and succeeded in drawing the Premier backwards; while Sammy, whose wits were keen enough to enable him to realise the danger of a struggle with a desperate man, took advantage of loosening his assailant’s grasp, and wriggled away, losing himself in the shadow of the building.

Longleat uttered a deep imprecation, and leaned panting against the pillar; then half-conscious that he had betrayed himself, he said:

‘The brute maddened me with his lies. It is well that you stopped me, or I might have shaken the breath out of his body. He is a mean, revengeful cur. I got him put



into prison for branding my cattle, and he has a spite against me. He sneaks up to the head station at Kooralbyn, and sits drinking with old Ferris, who would invent any cock-and-bull story while in his cups, and who is crazy enough to be jealous of me.'

He took Dyson's arm again, and the two walked on for several moments in silence. The young man's heart was beating violently, and his soul was shaken with horror and revolt. During the encounter with Deans, it had been borne in upon him that Longleat was guilty. He burned to speak out his suspicions, yet dared not, hardly knowing whether he dreaded most that they should be confirmed or meet with a lie.

The thought of disgrace was intolerable to him. Lowly birth and honest toil conveyed no shame to his frank Australian mind; but the suggestion of criminal taint in connection with Honoria was insupportable.

Presently Longleat spoke in a voice that sounded like a groan.

'It's true—when she knows of this she'll hate me for being her father. She couldn't help turning a little agen me for my rough ways and for not having been born a gentleman—I'm not blaming her. I brought her up to be proud—but I'd give my life, lad, that she should never hear the charge they've made against me to-night.'

'If the charge were false, Mr. Longleat, as you stated in the House, there would be no need that you should dread its coming to your daughter's knowledge.'

Dyson spoke with a meaning emphasis. Longleat relinquished his arm, and suddenly pausing, faced him.

'And if it were true!' he cried fiercely. 'You heard the story. A heartless scoundrel, one of the cursed breed of aristocrats, had wronged a young man's only sister, and the young man, who was a labourer and a Radical, and who



acknowledged no law but that of natural justice, which decrees that an eye shall be given for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life, had planned and compassed the death of the seducer. Was this deep-dyed guilt? But the law called it murder, hounded him down, tortured him for fourteen years, then set him free, branded with the stigma of crime—and not only him, but the children whom in later years he begot—daughters, maybe—perhaps one daughter whom he loved better than his life, whom he had slaved and toiled for, whom he had brought up like a lady—fit to be a queen—was not this reason sufficient that he should shun the publicity of an act which for nearly forty years had sat lightly enough on his soul?

‘It was an unfortunate case,’ said Dyson, while Longleat paused for a moment in his incoherent speech; ‘but it would have been more honest, it would have been happier for himself and for his daughter, if when the penalty had been paid he had faced his position fairly.’

‘There’s something in the prison taint,’ answered Longleat, speaking in a spasmodic, passionate manner, and still, as it were, making reference to a third person, ‘something that, no matter what stuff a man is made of, numbs his energies, and sickens him with shame and loathing, till his whole soul is filled with a burning desire to escape from his own flesh, to transform himself into a new creature, to face the world once more, unshackled by past associations and prejudices which he abhors—in a young land where the forest is free to all, and the rich and the poor are equal in the sight of God and man. . . . And it was so with this man. He flung away his former personality with his convict dress. He took another name that had struck him haphazard in a newspaper as unlike any he had ever known. He was eager for work. He had broken stones upon the road, and sweat and labour were no hardships to him. . . .

And little by little money came to him, and power, and honour ; and he had a dream of founding a new order of things, of being the ancestor of great men—patriots—soldiers—legislators.’

He paused again. They had reached The Bunyas, where from the fir-trees and the datura flowers, and the blossoming gardenias in the borders, there exhaled a strong night fragrance.

‘I am talking at random !’ he exclaimed. ‘I am excited—I am suffering—I don’t know what I am saying. No one shall ever lay it agen the Premier,’ he muttered, ‘that he did not die game. Come in. I have just a word more to say, and then I must be alone. Step gently, Dyson ; I don’t want Honoria to know that I have come back from the House. There mustn’t be any rumour of what has happened reach her ears yet. Time enough for that.’

He opened the wicket-gate and motioned to his companion to enter. As they silently crossed the lawn, Dyson, looking towards the lighted windows of the drawing-room, saw Honoria’s beautiful profile outlined upon the blind. Longleat watched it too for a moment, and heaved a painful sigh.

They entered the study, which, but for a decaying fire upon the hearth, was in darkness. Longleat lighted the candles upon the mantelshelf, and they shed a faint glow upon his haggard face, deadening its flabby whiteness, and deepening the wrinkles about the eyes and mouth.

Dyson was strangely touched.

‘Mr. Longleat,’ he said impulsively, holding out his hand, ‘I am deeply sorry for you.’

The old man grasped it for a moment, then wiped his brow with his silk pocket-handkerchief.

‘That has nought to do with it,’ he said, almost gruffly ; ‘but I thank you, lad. . . . I’ve had a blow to-day that’s

knocked me over—a stab that has cut deeper than anything Middleton has said. . . . The woman that I loved—that was as good as my wife—has played me false, and has gone off with another man. I learned it before I went into the House this afternoon; I got her letter there. The world's black to me, and I'd be glad to be out of it.'

'You mean,' said Dyson, hardly knowing what to answer, and feeling a strong repugnance to enter upon the subject, 'that Mrs. Vallancy has—has deceived you.'

'I gev her money and jewels,' continued Longleat; 'I'd almost settled a thousand a year on her for her life; I gev her all my heart and soul. More than that, everything was as nothing in comparison with her. . . . And she has gone to Fielding. O Lord! O Lord! how I loved her! I fought agen it, but it was no use. I wasn't one to steal what was another man's; I'd lived clean and honest. But there are passions in a man that are stronger than his will—it's human nature; they've been since the world began, and they can't be kept under. If her husband had been kind to her, and had treated her as she'd a right to be treated, I'd have kept away from her. But I meant to make her happy; I meant to marry her if I could. It was all fair and above-board in my mind. And now it's over, and my career is over. Fate has come upon me, and where's the use of struggling? . . . The things that I'd set my heart on are gone agen me. Those that I loved best have despised me. The country that I served is ready to turn round upon me. . . . There's been bitterness in the cup, but it's well-nigh drunk now. . . . Dyson, I've got one thing to ask you. Answer me as man to man—before God above us. If all this were true that Middleton has laid against me in the House, would it turn you from marrying Honoria?'

'Nothing would turn me from marrying Honoria,' replied Dyson, with equal impressiveness, 'if—if she would take me

to be her husband. Mr. Longleat, I don't wish to mislead you. As regards Middleton's charge, that would make no difference. All my life is hers and yours—if I can serve her through serving you. Do you understand me? But I cannot marry her unless she comes to me of her free will; and she does not love me now.'

Longleat heaved a deep sigh of relief.

'She'll be safe with you,' he said. 'It's what I've hoped all along. I had a firm faith that it 'ud come about. It's part of the fulfilment of my dream—and, who knows?—the rest may come true as well. You are a fine fellow. Don't hold back. Women are coy and proud, and Honoria is hard to understand; but if she hadn't loved you, she would never have given her word. I was afraid once of that cursed Englishman; but that's over, and I'm at rest about her. It's all I've ever wanted—that she should be happy.'

Dyson was silent; he could not undeceive him.

'Good-night,' said Longleat. 'Go out quietly, so that *she* shall not know that you have been here. To-morrow you shall come and talk to her; I want her to myself now. Come again in the morning.'

'Good-night,' replied Maddox. 'I will come early—the first thing to-morrow. You—you will not do anything before you see me again?'

He would fain have said more, but the expression of Longleat's face forbade him.

'You shall know what action I mean to take,' replied Longleat, evasively. 'Nothing can be done before to-morrow.'

The two men silently shook hands, and Dyson went away by the garden-gate as quietly as he had entered.

Longleat was alone.

Mechanically he threw a log upon the fire, and watched it splutter and blaze, then placed the candles upon the

table, and, leaning back in his great arm-chair, gazed moodily at the fantastic jets of flame which curled upwards from the glowing log.

Presently the inner door leading into the house opened noiselessly, and Honoria entered and stood opposite him.

'Papa,' she said softly, 'I came here to see whether you were back from the House. I knew that it must be over, for none of the windows are lighted. I grew so nervous sitting alone; I don't think that I am very well to-night. I kept Janie awake as long as I could; it was a promise that she should sit up the first night of the session. She had a notion that something very important would happen. Now she has fallen asleep upon the sofa in the drawing-room: and I wanted to talk to some one.'

There was an affectionate tone in Honoria's trembling voice, that sounded strangely in her father's ears, and was inexpressibly grateful to his heart. Her eyes were humid, and her face was almost beseeching in its tenderness. For a moment a choking lump in his throat would not let him speak, but he held out his arms to her, and she sank down upon the hearthrug at his feet.

'Papa,' she said, looking earnestly into his face, while she laid her hand timidly upon his knee, 'the House is over early to-night, isn't it? Has anything gone wrong? You look as though something were the matter.'

'N-no, Honie,' he faltered; 'nothing is the matter.'

'You are troubled,' she persisted; 'you are unhappy; I see it in your face. There's only you and me; let us help each other if we can. . . . I—oh! I have been a bad daughter; I have not tried as I ought to sympathise with you. . . . Papa, I would comfort you if I could.'

'Honie,' he said huskily, taking her soft white hand into his horny palm, 'there need nought come between us two now. What there was is over and done with; it was a

madness—a bad dream—that's past, and—and, my dear, all my heart is yours, and my life is yours ; and I—I am your father, Honie.'

For a moment the feeling of repulsion which had always overcome her at the suggestion of her father's infatuation for Mrs. Vallancy held Honoria motionless and silent. Longleat heaved a deep sigh ; it found its echo in her heart. She drooped her head, laying her forehead against his knees. He could not see her face, but he felt the pressure of her fingers tighten round his own.

'Honie !' he went on, in the same choked, whispering voice, 'don't let it ever trouble you, my dear, by-and-by, that you and I were different-like, and that we didn't somehow come together as we ought to have done. . . . There's things in life that are hard to understand. Maybe God 'ull make more allowance up there for human nature than folks down below. . . . A rough man like me, with rude passions and coarse ways, was bound to grate upon the notions of a delicate-minded creature like you. It could not have been expected that things would be otherwise—that's human nature too. I had brought you up different to what I was myself. I had reared you softly and kept you apart ; that was my pride for you. It was in my mind from the time that you were a pretty little baby to educate you to be a lady. I didn't want you to be of the same kind as your mother and me. Remember that, Honie, if ever—if ever it should happen that you think hardly of me for being your father.'

'Father, father !' cried Honoria, abashed and shame-stricken ; oh, don't talk like that. You break my heart.'

'Don't cry, Honie !' he said, with deep tenderness, though sobs shook his own frame. 'Oh, my dear, if I could make you a lady born—a gentleman's daughter—I'd sacrifice my life to do it. What's my life to your happiness? What am

I that I should own such an one as you for my child? It's when I've been with you that I've felt most ashamed of my roughness. I don't mind confessing to it now. I've loved you better than you've ever dreamed of. Even when there were passions in my heart that I didn't dare to speak of, my love for you was deepest and surest. I kept the two separate. . . . But there was always the thought that you looked down upon me and held aloof from me ; and I had come to believe it best that you should go your way and I mine. All that I wished was that you should be happy, and in spite of all I had a firm trust that you'd marry Dyson. It's that which reconciles me to everything now.'

'Papa,' cried Honoria, passionately, 'you think that I cannot realise what you have felt ; but it is not so. . . . I know what it is to be carried away beyond oneself—beyond what one knows to be right and pure ; and then to be ashamed, to hate oneself. Oh, I understand. . . . And it is that which has changed me—which has made me sorry and has taught me to distrust myself and others. . . . I haven't been a good daughter to you. I want to make amends. If *that* is all over—oh, come away with me and Janie. Let me show you that I can love you. Let me try to make your life happy. Oh, papa ! let us hold together. Let us help one another.'

He bent forward and clasped her in his arms, fondling her and murmuring inarticulate words of love, while he mingled his tears with hers, though, indeed, her weeping was rather the reaction after intense excitement than the outcome of deep emotion such as now agitated him. And he, divining this, by the aid of that subtle sympathy which gives the parent's heart insight into that of the child, knowing that their souls did not now, and never could fairly meet, put her ever so slightly from him, and whispered gently :

'My gell, it is not your father that you must mind now,

and I am best content that it should be so. Open your heart to your husband, and show him all your love ; Dyson is worthy of confidence. Don't bottle up your feelings from him. Soft words and kisses are the food of married love. . . . He'll take my place by-and-by, and little Janie will live with you. She'll have the northern stations ; Kooralbyn and this place will be your portion. With Jem Bagot's money you'll be a rich woman. Life will go smooth with you. It's what I've prayed and hoped for, that you'd be a great lady in the new country, and that your children should be rulers in the land. . . . When you have got little ones of your own you'll know, Honie, you'll know.'

Honoria's face crimsoned, but she did not speak. How could she confide in him now? How could she shape into words those complex impulses which made her heart a problem to her understanding?

They sat thus silently for some time longer, he gently caressing her, she with her head bent against his knee, sorrowful and wondering ; each yearning towards the other, each mournfully conscious of the barrier of mutual incomprehension which divided them.

At last Longleat said :

'I think that I'd like to kiss the little lass before she is carried up to bed.'

Honoria rose, and they went together to the drawing-room, where Janie, her quaint, unchildlike face turned upwards, her elfin locks strewing the pillow, lay all in the glow of the dying fire.

Longleat bent down and kissed solemnly the child's lips, her brow, her hands.

'Poor little wench !' he murmured. 'God keep the little lass !'

Janie opened her large, sleepy eyes.

'Papa,' she said incoherently, 'have you done fighting



with Mr. Middleton yet? I wish that you would make haste and beat him, and take us back to the Bush. I don't like stopping here. I want to go back to Kooralbyn.'

Longleat kissed her once more, then lifted her from the sofa and placed her in Honoria's arms. A stifled sob shook his body.

'Take her to bed,' he said huskily. 'It's getting late. . . . And you go too, Honie; you go too.'

Honoria looked at him wistfully.

'It is eleven o'clock,' she replied. 'I will go, papa. And you are tired as well,' she added. 'Do not sit up for long.'

'No; I will not. I—have a little work to do—and then—then I shall go to rest,' said Longleat, turning away so that she should not see his face.

She kissed him gently, and bade him good-night; then left the room, bearing Janie in her arms.

Longleat watched her till she had disappeared. When she had gone, he knelt down and laid his head for a moment upon the sofa cushion where Janie had rested. His lips moved, but he spoke below his breath. A camellia which had dropped from Honoria's breast lay upon the floor. He picked it up and carried it with him to the study, where he seated himself again in the large arm-chair beside the fire.

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By Mr. Longleat's express orders, no servant ever entered his private sanctum in the morning till he had himself given permission. It was his habit to study or write till a late hour, and his papers were usually left in confusion upon the table, so that it was dangerous to allow them to be disturbed.

Thus, when at nine o'clock the next morning Dyson Maddox presented himself at the side-door which communicated with the garden, the Premier had not been aroused. All night the young man had tossed upon an uneasy pillow,

wakeful with the sense of an undefined dread, which, indeed, the events of the previous evening sufficiently warranted.

He determined that before any line of action could be adopted, he would see the Premier, would beseech his full confidence, and would then take counsel with him as to the proper course to pursue. He felt certain that, under the circumstances, it would be best for Longleat to retract the denial he had uttered in the House, resign the leadership of the Government, and again face his constituents.

As soon as it was practicable, Dyson rose, dressed, and walked to The Bunyas, choosing the side-entrance as that least likely to excite comment, and intending to make his way into the house by means of the French windows of the drawing-room, which were always unclosed.

But instinct led him to the study-door. He knocked, and, receiving no answer, pulled back the venetian shutters; their light bolts yielded readily to the assault; he pushed open the glass door and entered.

The morning light streamed into the quiet room across the office table, where the papers were all in order, the Hansards piled neatly together, and upon which stood the Premier's despatch-box with the key in the lock. In the large morocco-covered chair which was placed at one side of the empty fireplace, Longleat himself was sitting. There was a strange inertness and an unnatural stillness in his attitude which caused a shudder to run through Dyson's frame, and imparted the first suspicion of what had happened. The head was bent forward upon the chest; the hands were tightly clenched; the legs extended with a peculiar rigidity.

Dyson spoke to him by his name, but he neither moved nor answered. The young man approached the inanimate body and tried to raise the heavy head, but it was tense and cold.

'Good God!' exclaimed Dyson, in a tone of horror. 'He is dead!'

It was even so. The Premier had effectually escaped from the ruin with which he had been threatened.

Tightly enclosed in his stiffened fingers was a small empty phial—the instrument of his death. It was marked ‘Poison,’ and contained a solution of prussic acid, one drop of which as a dose had, Dyson knew, acted as a speedy calmant in the attacks of palpitation of the heart to which the Premier had been subject.

Upon the desk Dyson saw a sealed envelope addressed to himself. Within it was a sheet of paper, upon which, without either formal beginning or ending, these words were written in Longleat’s hand :

‘Use every endeavour to obtain the papers and to quash the inquiry.’

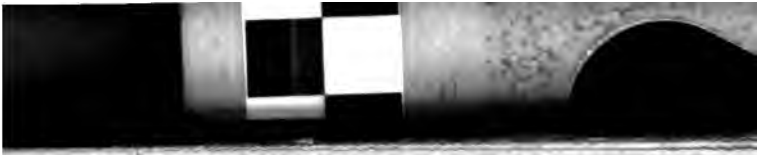
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## CHAPTER XLIII.

### THE KNOTTING OF THE THREADS.

EVENTS succeeded each other thickly after the death of the Premier. The public excitement and curiosity was intense, and it was entirely owing to Dyson’s exertions that only comparative publicity was given to the circumstances which attended Longleat’s death, and that the true state of the case never came to Honoria’s knowledge. The inquest was conducted as privately as possible, and a verdict was delivered to the effect that death had resulted from an overdose of a solution of prussic acid, administered medicinally to himself by the deceased, which had operated fatally upon an already diseased and excited condition of the arterial organs.

It may be questioned how far the faculty and those more enlightened upon the subject coincided with the coroner’s verdict, but, to the general public, it appeared satisfactory enough. The people mourned their leader as though he



had been a hero. Letters were written in the newspapers advocating the erection of a monument at the public expense, in commemoration of his patriotism and his virtues.

His funeral *cortège* was followed by great and simple in the land. The public offices and shops were closed. The ships and steamers in the river wore their flags half-mast high. Obituary notices appeared in the journals of Leichardt's Land, edged with deep printer's black, and every sign of public mourning was rigorously observed.

The excitement of Longleat's sudden death almost swept away that which had been produced by the extraordinary scene in the House on the evening preceding it.

The debate was hushed up, and was never fully reported. Those who had believed in the Premier's guilt endeavoured for the sake of Dyson and Honoria to bury their convictions in their own breasts, while those whose faith in their chief had never wavered, reverted triumphantly among themselves to his strenuous denial of Middleton's charge as conclusive evidence in his favour.

Dyson Maddox had a long interview with the leader of the Opposition, and succeeded in obtaining the papers relating to Prancard's trial, and a promise that the subject should be dropped without further inquiry. Later on, when the House met again, it was briefly alluded to and dismissed in a personal explanation by Mr. Middleton; but now the business of forming the new Ministry occupied both sides to the exclusion of other considerations. The great Loan Bill was not passed that session. An amalgamation Government was formed, upon which the views of both parties were modified in an extraordinary manner, and the Railway question was waived till the following year. Dyson Maddox still retained his post, and Mr. Middleton accepted that of Attorney-General.

Upon the night after her father's funeral, Honoria sat

alone in the drawing-room at The Bunyas. Mrs. Ferris had been written to, and was expected to arrive from Kooralbyn upon the morrow. It had been by Honoria's wish that she had been sent for, and the old lady's feelings would have been deeply gratified could she have realised how ardently her advent was desired by her favourite charge.

Honoria, broken down by the shock of her father's sudden death, by grief, remorse, and the more complex emotions of her own heart, was no longer the brilliant creature who had despised the old lady's babble, and had gloried in her independence of the common solaces of vexed humanity. At present she had an intense and womanly desire to sob out her late grief and agitation upon that sympathising if uncomprehending bosom. Yet she was at this time calmer than she had been for months.

The horror of sudden bereavement had counteracted the baleful effects of Barrington's influence, and the substitution of Dyson's soothing ministrations for the feverish and unhealthy fascination which the Englishman had exercised upon her, had restored her nervous system to a more equable balance. Dyson had been very near to her during the days which had followed her father's death. He had thought and acted for her, and had spared her from distressing contact with the outer world. So carefully did he guard her that not a breath of vulgar insinuation had as yet reached her ears. His tact and delicate consideration had saved her from much that would have been painful and annoying; and though he had never again spoken of his love, it seemed to encompass her like the air she breathed.

She was thinking, with some satisfaction, that this was the last evening which she should spend by her solitary hearth, when suddenly a loud ring sounded at the entrance-door, and a minute later, without warning or announcement, a gentleman was ushered into her presence.

Honorina started to her feet, and found herself confronted by Barrington.

He was very pale, and had the tall, gaunt look of a man who had just risen from a sick-bed. He advanced slowly, with deep respect expressed in his gesture and bearing, while his hollow-set eyes mournfully sought her gaze.

During her wakeful nights, Honorina had often of late trembled at the thought of this meeting. She had feared that, were she again to encounter Barrington's eyes, all power of self-control would desert her, and that she should once more become a prey to the nervous terror which in his presence had overpowered her.

Yet, strange as it seemed to her then and later, after the momentary shock occasioned by his sudden appearance, she felt herself sustained by a moral and physical strength of which in their former intercourse she had been absolutely bereft. How, or when, she knew not, but it was certain that the enchantment had been broken.

She stood up very tall and stately in her clinging black gown. A deep blush dyed her face and neck, but in a moment vanished and left an ashy paleness.

'I beg your pardon,' began Barrington; 'I am afraid that I have startled you. Forgive me; I would not let the servant announce me. I thought that if you heard my name you might perhaps refuse to see me. I have come to you as soon as it was possible. I am very weak—this is the first day that I have left my bed, but I could not rest longer without speaking to you.'

He spoke very quietly; and she, with the strange feeling of listening to her own voice as to the voice of another person, replied in a low, constrained manner:

'You were right. Had I known that you were here, I should have refused to see you. It is an insult to me to force yourself upon me in this way. You can have nothing

to say to me—*now!* Will you go away at once? If not, I must leave the room.'

'Honor! he exclaimed in a passionate tone, as he approached and looked down upon her.

She shrank involuntarily. He had placed himself so that she could not readily gain the door. A wave of scorn and indignation passed over her soul. She moved a step backwards, and then faced him without flinching.

'Let me pass,' she said.

'No. Will you not wait one moment, and hear what I have to say? Are you afraid of me? Are you angry with me? What have I done, that you should treat me so disdainfully? Is all my love to go for nothing because of a fancy—a misconception? . . . I swear that you were sacred to me. Could you have thought that I would insult you who had consented to bear my name? I have come tonight to ask you again to be my wife. . . . I love you as I can love no other woman. What I offer you is not unworthy of your acceptance. I can place you in the station to which you are suited—amid the refined surroundings for which your nature has craved. . . . I come to you in the deepest humility. I confess that I was greatly to blame for placing you in a position which might compromise you. I have endured agonies since that night. My madness—my passion for you led me beyond the bounds of prudence. I wish to atone. How can I prove my loyalty more effectually than by offering to make you my wife? . . .'

'*You offer to make me your wife,*' she said, in low, distinct tones. '*You are very loyal.*'

'Honor! you *will* misunderstand me. I am ready now to sacrifice my prospects, to disregard my mother's prayers, if it is your desire that I should remain longer in Australia. . . . Only tell me your wishes, and I will obey them at any cost. Darling, you were not so hard to move a little while

ago. You know that your heart is all mine. It is I who have taught you to love. Oh, Honoria, come to me !

'Let me pass,' she said again, with an imperious gesture.

He fell back a few paces, and she went on, speaking with withering scorn :

'Every word that you utter is an insult. Your love is an insult. . . . I thought a little while ago that the shame of looking in your face would be too intolerable. I am glad that I have been able to bear it—that I might tell you with my own lips that the spell you cast over me is broken. I can have no feeling for you but pity. . . . I wish never to hear your voice again. Good-bye.'

She walked steadily past him and left the room, without bestowing upon him another word or glance. When she had reached her own chamber she bolted the door and threw herself, all quivering and unnerved, upon the bed.

Barrington, left alone in the drawing-room, lingered for a little while in the hope that Honoria might return. He put forth all the strength of his will to recall her, but it was in vain. As she herself had said, the spell was broken.

He stood, looking round the room, and noting all those little traces of the being beloved which are so patent to the eye of a lover—her work, her books, the flowers she had touched, the mirror which had reflected her beauty ; and there was a maddening pain in the conviction which was borne in upon his heart, that Honoria had passed out of his life for ever, and that he must fill up the blank as best he could.

There was a photograph of her standing in a little velvet frame upon the mantelshelf. He took it up and carried it away with him.

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Upon the following day Mrs. Ferris arrived from Kooralbyn. The old lady kissed Honoria and blessed her and



wept over her, at one moment bemoaning the rupture of her engagement with Barrington, who still retained a tender place in Aunt Pen's regard, at another congratulating her upon her impending marriage with Dyson.

Mrs. Ferris shed many tears over the Premier's fate, and could find no terms of reprobation sufficiently strong to stigmatise the conduct of Mrs. Vallancy, who, she was convinced, had been at the bottom of all the mischief.

'Aunt Penelope,' said Honoria, when they had been talking for a little while together, 'I am thinking of going away for a time, and of taking Janie with me. I want a change of scene. Will you come with us to Tasmania? We shall spend the summer there, perhaps take a trip to New Zealand, and then winter in Sydney or Melbourne.'

'But what is to become of my old man?' cried Mrs. Ferris, with the tears streaming down her cheeks. 'My love, it went to my heart to leave him yesterday. I couldn't have done it if I hadn't felt it my duty to come to you. Anthony was always a little crazy, but since Angela died there isn't a grain of sense left in him. And he is such a poor weak creature and has so fallen to nothing that a rough wind might easily blow him away. Now is my turn, my love. There's always work in the world for geniuses. It's we dull women who must be the soothers and sympathisers. But, do what I will, I can't interest Anthony. If he would only look at his pictures or take down his Shakespeare I should feel happier; but there he sits all day long, with his hands folded before him and his eyes fixed in a vacant stare upon the mountains or the sky, till a poor body's heart aches with the longing to comfort him. He takes no heed of anything. Even when I told him of your father's death he just looked up and nodded his head, and it's my belief that when night came he had forgotten what I said to him.'

Honoria finally decided, and to her credit be it recorded,

to invite the old man to bear them company in their travels ; but this he curtly refused to do. He would not leave Kooralbyn ; nor ever afterwards could he be persuaded to quit the vicinity of his daughter's grave. It was his harmless fancy that the spirit of Angela still hovered round her old haunts, and that in the dim twilight of a summer's evening he might again behold in some secluded nook by the river the shadowy, white-robed form of his lost darling.

He lived on at Kooralbyn, a decrepit old man of disconnected speech and wandering steps, whose closest earthly interests seemed centred upon the quiet spot beneath the cedar-trees where Angela lay buried.

Soon after the death of the Premier, Honoria, accompanied by Mrs. Ferris and Janie, set off on a visit to Tasmania.

Dyson Maddox made all the necessary arrangements for their departure and absence from Leichardt's Land, taking upon himself the burden of providing for the management of the various stations, and of all business transactions from which it was possible that Honoria could be relieved ; with great tact and delicacy he warded from her all distasteful companionship or malevolent gossip, and guarded against any jarring of her sensibilities by a careful avoidance of allusion to their mutual relations.

It was only by the strongest effort of self-control that he maintained the fraternal demeanour that characterised his intercourse with her, while she, in her turn, was nervously fearful lest he should suspect her of in any way misconstruing his motives.

Though neither dared approach the subject, it had at first been tacitly understood between them, that during Honoria's lengthy absence the rupture of the false engagement should be announced ; but of late, as day by day her dependence upon him became greater, and her insight into his character

deeper, frank understanding between them seemed to grow more and more impossible.

A great sadness had settled upon Honoria ; she was often silent, and indulged in fits of melancholy retrospection, brooding over the estrangement which had divided her from her father, upon their last mournful interview, and upon his wish, so forcibly expressed then, that she should become Dyson's wife.

During the time that she remained at The Bunyas after the Premier's death, she shunned society, refused all sympathy and condolence, and, with a mingling of dread and impatience, waited for the moment of her departure and of her farewell to Dyson, when she fancied that the barrier of reserve between them might at last be broken down.

He accompanied them as far as the Bay, whence he had arranged to return to Leichardt's Town in the Government steamtug.

He, too, looked worn and harassed ; his eyes rested frequently upon Honoria, and he busied himself in preparations for her comfort ; but he held aloof from her side, and seemed anxious to avoid taking advantage of any opportunity that occurred for private conversation between them.

Honoria sat still upon the deck, her eyes, humid with unshed tears, fixed vacantly upon the opposite shores ; a pain, which she had never known before, gnawing at her heart, as she realised that each landmark passed represented so many moments the less to be spent with Dyson.

At last the freshening breeze, laden with salt whiffs from the ocean, the widening river, the line of beacons which marked the bar, the slackening of the steamer's speed—told her that the time had come.

In a choked voice she called him to her. He was at her side in a moment. She rose from her seat, and they moved apart and stood against the bulwarks together.

Honorina raised her veil, and he saw how pale she was, and how her lips trembled, and her eyes were dim with tears.

‘Honorina!’ he said only, but there was deep meaning in his tone.

‘I am sorry,’ she faltered,—‘sorry to say good-bye. . . . And I wish to thank you—to tell you—I cannot bear that we should part without a word. . . . You think that I have been blind to your goodness—I have not—indeed—indeed . . .’

‘I understand,’ he said, very low, bending over her and tightly clasping her hand. ‘I did not mean to speak now; I wished that you should go away—that you should be untrammelled by any thought that I had the remotest claim upon your life. All my desire has been to trample down my own feelings, if it were best for you that I should be a cipher. . . . You know what has been in my heart—and I have tried to root it out, but it was of no use. I thought that when you had gone away it would be less difficult, perhaps, to give you up. . . . If you cannot love me, Honorina—as you have never yet loved—it will be happiest for us both that we should never meet again—and so it should be. I would leave Leichardt’s Land—if otherwise—then you have but to write me one word, and I will come to you. . . . God keep you!—Good-bye. . . .’

With one last pressure of her hand he left her side ere she could utter a word in reply. . . . Presently he went on board the steam-launch, which turned her prow towards Leichardt’s Town, while Honorina was borne across the bar, oceanwards.

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Honorina took a cottage in Hobart Town, where by the banks of the Derwent she and Janie passed several quiet months. Mrs. Ferris, having installed her young charges in

the care of an unobtrusive elderly friend, returned to her husband at Kooralbyn.

Later on, Dyson Maddox found his way to Tasmania, and he and Honoria were married.

Dyson is now Premier of Leichardt's Land. To him has been entrusted the floating of the Loan and the carrying out of Longleat's Railway. A little while ago he and his wife made the grand tour by way of America, and spent a season in London, where Honoria had ample opportunities for studying English life. Mrs. Maddox was presented at Court; she was fortunate in having good introductions, and her beauty and fascinating manners were the theme of comment in general and even fashionable society. Her reputation for enormous wealth added largely to her popularity, and there was some talk of the formation of a company for the more effectual working of the Tarangella tin-mine.

At a dinner-party in the house of a great London lady Honoria met Barrington. He was with his wife, the daughter of a peer, a lady of statuesque appearance and cold manners, who in a moment identified the Australian beauty as the original of a certain photograph in a velvet-covered frame which reposed in a secret drawer of her husband's despatch-box, and was connected with that brief sojourn in the Antipodes, of which she could never persuade him to speak frankly.

Barrington and Honoria bowed stiffly at first, but afterwards Lord and Lady Dolph Basset furnished a text for conversation. Lord Dolph was still living at Dyraaba, neither less enthusiastic nor more practical than heretofore, and Maggie still rode buck-jumpers and helped to brand the calves. There was no talk of their coming to England, nor did Lord Headington show any particular anxiety to greet his Australian sister-in-law.

It would have been contrary to human nature had Bar-

rington abstained from satisfying himself as to whether Honoria had found the true road to happiness. Probably he put a leading question, for Dyson, hovering about his wife, caught the words, delivered with a stronger emphasis than the languid interest of an after-dinner conversation appeared to warrant :

‘I have never regretted having married an Australian ; and I wish for no better fate than to cast in my lot with that of Leichardt’s Land.’

Lady Edith Barrington joined with her husband in a courteous invitation to the Maddoxes to visit Castle Barrington, but it was declined, and Honoria never saw the home which might have been her own.

Sammy Deans is still accused of branding his neighbour’s cattle, and Tom Dungie has given up running the mail, and has installed Miss MacCutchan as the mistress of the Selection and of the little ‘piebald.’

Corny Cathcart has never been to Barramunda since Honoria went there shortly after her marriage. He is managing the station ‘up north,’ which in the Premier’s will was left to little Janie.

Brian Fielding is married, and those interested in Constance Vallancy’s fate may witness her nightly performances as an actress at the Regalia Theatre.

Honoria’s boys are stalwart young Australians, who have already announced their intention of distinguishing themselves upon the boards of the House, and who promise fair fulfilment of their grandfather’s ambition.

THE END.







